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U.S. Military Intervention in Colombia: Strategic and Operational Planning Considerations

A Monograph

by

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**School of Advanced Military Studies
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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Abstract

U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN COLOMBIA: STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS by MAJ Bryan P. Hernandez, USA, 70 pages.

Colombia is on the verge of collapse because of the instability generated by leftist guerrilla groups, drug traffickers, and right-wing paramilitaries against the Colombian government and its ability to provide security for the people of the state. In the past twenty years, Colombia has experienced an escalated, internal conflict due to the synergy created between these three non-state actors, which have stymied attempts by the government and other international actors to find a peaceful solution. The deteriorating environment in Colombia has significant implications for the security and political environment of the region and the United States, especially in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks against the United States and subsequent War on Terrorism.

This monograph focuses on the strategic and operational considerations for US military intervention in fighting the complex conflict in Colombia as a potential base-planning document, while also analyzing the necessity of greater unified military action-to include its possibility for success, in order to solve Colombia's narco-terrorist, insurgent threat. The purpose of analysis is to provide a strategic and operational context of the narco-paramilitary-insurgent problem in Colombia, by utilizing operational design to understand the complexities of the primary threats and provide a conceptual framework for future planning.

The conclusion is that the scope of the conflict is beyond Colombia's capacity to cope with based upon the strategic aims and operational capabilities of the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug trade. Further, the Colombian government is failing because two critical elements necessary for democratic rule still do not exist, stability and security. Colombian strategy must change by developing political objectives and a military strategy aimed at restoring stability and security through an integrated effort by Colombia, its neighbors, and the United States. Based upon an assessment of the situation at the strategic and operational level, military action may be the only possible means to eliminate the threats within Colombia and set the conditions for a transition to normalcy, however, this will require cooperation and assistance from other nations in order for Colombia to be successful.

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CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM IN COLOMBIA

INTRODUCTION

In September 2001 the United States was attacked by an international terrorist organization that demonstrated their capability to kill Americans and destroy their symbols of economic, political, and military power within their own borders. One year later, the President published his new National Security Strategy (NSS) and announced a more deliberate and aggressive strategy to eliminate such threats and prevent another attack against the United States, its citizens, and interests, both domestic and foreign. The emphasis of this strategy has had clear implications for the US instruments of power in the War on Terrorism, especially an expanded role for the armed forces in persecuting the various campaigns of the war. By declaring that the US will “disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations by direct and continuous action using all elements of national and international power and …identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders”¹, the US has set upon a course of action for further global employment of its armed forces in the fight against terrorism.

Nested within the context of NSS is the paradigm that terrorist organizations are finding renewed strength in their ability to organize, arm, and train within chaotic countries and that “America now is threatened less by conquering states than by failed ones.”² Approaching this dilemma is complex because it requires the US to either engage unilaterally or multilaterally in the sovereign affairs of other nation-states in order to directly attack terrorist organizations and reverse the conditions in which they are allowed to operate. The United States acknowledges the need for a multilateral approach in order to strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and

¹ U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2002), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

work to prevent attacks against the United States and its allies, but has reserved the right to act alone³.

The important issue in Colombia is the US's approach to solving what is a regional conflict and how to generate strategic and operational objectives with regional actors that will allow them to work together in order to diffuse Colombia's expanding problem. The possible collapse of Colombia presents such a threat, and based upon the recent recognition by the US government of the insurgent groups operating against its government as "terrorists", the potential for a greater US role, to include military forces, is possible. The NSS specifically addresses the growing terrorist threat in Colombia stating, " We recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups."⁴

This monograph focuses on the strategic and operational conditions for US military intervention in fighting the complex insurgency in Colombia as a potential base-planning document, while also analyzing the overall possibility of success by means of military action in order to solve Colombia's narco-terrorist, insurgent threat. The purpose of analysis is to provide a strategic and operational context of the insurgency problem in Colombia, which includes the paramilitaries and the drug trade. Further, to provide an operational design, according to current methods used for campaign analysis, in order to establish a conceptual framework for future planning.

The relevance of this monograph is embedded in two questions that arise from selecting such a topic, first, is a military solution necessary and viable, and second, is a US intervention within the realm of the possible? The first question will be answered through the analysis of the monograph. The second question, due to the uncertainties of the international system's reaction to

³ The related goals stated in the NSS are 1. Strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against the US and its friends, 2. Work with others to defuse regional conflicts, 3. Prevent US enemies from threatening the US, its allies, and its friends, with weapons of mass destruction. U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Wash, D.C.: GPO, 2002), 1.

the US War on Terrorism and the political climates within the US and Colombia, is answered by critical assumptions, however uncertain, but necessary for planning purposes. A key factor is what the insurgents, drug traffickers, and paramilitaries do in the future to either directly attack or threaten US citizens at home or abroad that would set the conditions for such a response by the US in Colombia.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent US War on Terrorism, there exists a greater probability that the US, in conjunction with the Colombian government, would authorize the use of US forces in Colombia for the purpose to defeat the insurgency, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. The Colombian government has reversed the peace process and now is attempting to end the insurgency with a military solution. The newly elected President Alvaro Uribe has authorized an increase in the size of the military and declared a state of interior commotion (Estado de Commocion Interior) that allows the executive to rule by decree, expanding judicial powers to the police and military.⁵ In regards to intervention by the US, its national security objectives have changed to a significant degree that will allow for the expanded use of US military forces beyond current counter-drug operations to counter-insurgency operations. Furthermore, the insurgents, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers are now viewed as terrorist organizations that constitute a viable “terrorist threat”⁶ to the United States and its interests. Based upon these key facts and assumptions, the use of US forces in Colombia may be within the realm of the possible and preparing for such an intervention is viable at the strategic and operational level for planning.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵ Arlene B. Tickner, “Colombia and the United States: From Counternarcotics to Counter terrorism,” *Current History* 102, no.661 (February 2003): 83.

⁶ President, NSS., (Wash, D.C., 2002), 10.

THE COLOMBIAN PROBLEM

In 2003, Colombia is on the verge of collapse and pathway to a failed state because of the internal conflict generated by guerrilla organizations, drug trafficking, and paramilitaries against the Colombian government and its ability to provide security for the people of the state. These three organizations have formed a “Hobbesian Trinity”⁷, according to COL Joseph R. Nunez, a US military expert on the region, which threatens the political legitimacy of the state. Furthermore, according to Angel Rabassa and Peter Chalk in their work *Colombian Labyrinth*, the complexity of the problem has increased due to the “synergies and interactions of an underground criminal drug economy and the growth of armed challenges to the state’s authority”⁸. The synergy of these three elements, compounded by deeper social and economic problems, has created a complex situation wherein the threat to Colombia’s government is real and the regional and international implications; severe, especially for the United States.

Since the early 1980s the social, political, and economic problems of Colombia have been violently demonstrated on the streets of Bogotá and within the farthest reaches of the jungle. In the following two decades Colombia has been victim to an enormous expansion of the drug trade, from coca production, processing, and trafficking along with a simultaneous resurgence of leftist guerrilla groups (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia-FARC* and *Ejercito Nacional de Liberacion-ELN*), and right-wing paramilitaries (*Auto-Defensas de Colombia-AUC*) throughout Colombia. The Colombian government and military, with US assistance, have tried to contain and eliminate what they believed to be the culprit of this complex problem, the drug trade, while not fully addressing or attacking the growing threat of the insurgents and paramilitaries to the stability of the country. Billions of US dollars later, thousands of Colombians

⁷ Joseph R. Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia: A New Strategy for Peace* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 2.

⁸ Angel Rabassa, and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation Publishing, 2001), 1.

murdered, and the problem is worse, and more complex, than ever. These three organizations' ability to be extremely adaptive, self-organizing systems has frustrated the Colombian government and demonstrated the failures of US foreign policy. Recent attempts to successively negotiate a peace settlement under Plan Colombia, led by former President Andrew Pastrana, with the leftist guerrillas and paramilitaries have failed. In the interim these groups have developed stronger ties to the drug trade and expanded their operations into urban centers while solidifying their gains in the more rural areas. These past attempts and current initiatives may illuminate the complexity and protracted nature of the problem that with the marriage of the insurgent and paramilitary organizations with the drug trade there has been a transition from former ideologically motivated bases to those of criminality, and thus their political objectives and motives have changed and the possibility exists that no peaceful solution is possible.

The FARC and ELN seek to take power in Colombia and turn the country into a socialist state, while continuing to consolidate their control of the drug trade (primarily within southeastern Colombia) while deriving economic benefits from control of the entire cocaine refinement process.⁹ The paramilitaries act, in the absence of government security forces and intervention, as self-legitimized preservers of the state against the guerrillas while also seeking to consolidate control of the drug trade in other regions of Colombia. The remaining autonomous drug cartels seek to maintain a limit on the impact of both the government, the guerrillas, and paramilitaries on the drug trade while continuing to expand their operations in other illicit drug markets. The result is the state's inability to affect these three organizations by reestablishing control and integration of the country and reasserting sovereignty from these factional organizations. Unfortunately, each of these groups receives millions of dollars annually due to drug trafficking and their self interests argue for a propensity to maintain Colombia on the "edge of chaos" in order to prosper; instability is therefore stability.

⁹ Ibid.

However, prior to discussing these three organizations, it is imperative to understand the nature of each group by defining them through their objectives, composition, and means, i.e., insurgents, paramilitaries, criminal organizations, or terrorists. Insurgency, according to modern definition, is an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict¹⁰; this would incorporate both the FARC and ELN. The paramilitaries, in regards to Colombia, are right wing self-defense organizations that act within the absence of the government in defeating the insurgents, the AUC. Finally, due to the nature of the drug trade, the drug cartels are categorized as criminal organizations. The issue becomes difficult, as many have labeled these organizations under one of two titles, narco-guerrillas or narco-terrorists. The FARC and AUC both receive funding from the drug trade and employ terrorist means in order to pursue their political objectives, however, their complex nature makes it difficult to label them as just narco-guerillas or narco-terrorists, although they may be headed that way in the future.¹¹ For the purpose of this monograph, though, the FARC and ELN will be addressed as insurgents or guerrillas, and the AUC, as paramilitaries. The use of the terms narco-guerrilla and narco-terrorist will be applied when the objective of the organization has changed or is changing to that of criminal activity that employs terrorism for no other purpose than fear, without regard to political ideology or social reform.

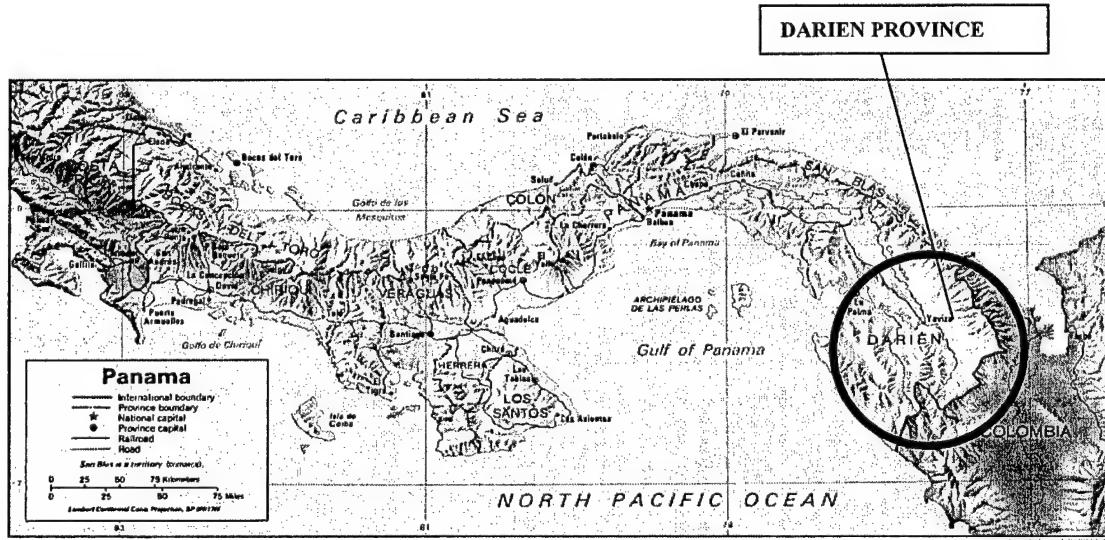
Colombia: The Strategic Impact of Geography, Economics, and Politics

Colombia's geography and socio-political trends are necessary to analyze in order to understand the environment in which the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug cartels have been able to organize and operate, creating a credible threat to the security of the state as a whole. Colombia, today, is a victim of its own history of economic, social, political, and geographic

¹⁰ Webster's *Unabridged Dictionary* (1996).

¹¹ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 1.

patterns of growth. Colombia is approximately three times the size of Montana, encompassing 1,138,910 square kilometers. Its geographic location has made it critical for trade between Central and South American countries and the United States. Colombia has two coastlines that border both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea- key areas in the transshipment of drugs. To the north, Colombia shares its border with Panama. This border region (Darien Province) is a remote frontier between the two states consisting of a very dense jungle region that is lightly populated, very porous, and difficult to control for either country. Approximately 225 km in length, this remote area has historically been a frontier region and recently has become a safe haven for both guerrillas and paramilitaries, to include a point of departure for raids into Panama by both groups for the purpose of kidnapping individuals-a source of revenue for their organizations.



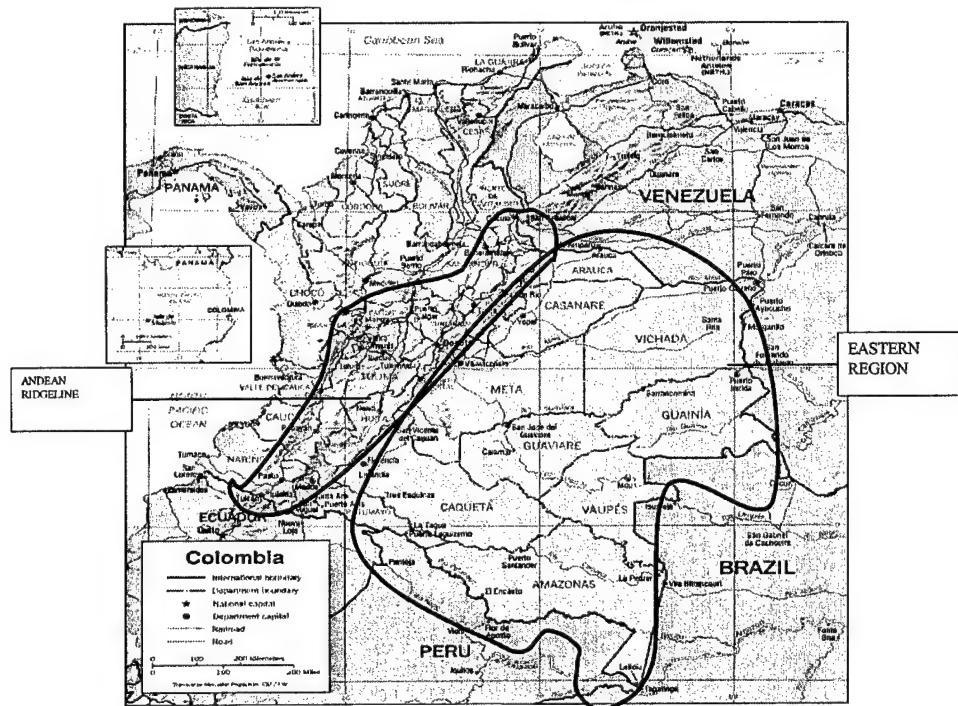
Source: CIA Website, www.cia.gov

Figure 1: Map of Darien Region

Colombia's eastern region, the largest area of Colombia, shares borders with four other South American countries, Ecuador (590 km), Peru (1,490 km), Brazil (1,643 km), and Venezuela (2,050 km). The eastern region has historically remained sparsely populated due to its remoteness and harsh living conditions in comparison with the Central Highland and coastal regions. It remains the least populated region within Colombia and has historically been the

weakest area of governmental control and presence due to its vastness. Consequently, it has developed into the region where the guerrillas and drug trade have been able to establish a large and lasting presence. Characterized by dense lowland jungle regions, where infrastructure and road networks are rudimentary and the preponderance of travel is by river or foot, much of the eastern region, especially along its most eastern edges with Venezuela and Brazil, has been an area of advantage for both guerrilla and drug activity. These very porous frontiers, because of their size and location within the Amazon Basin, have historically been used as trade routes between peasants in the region, attracting little attention from regional governmental authorities and thus have developed into the same routes used for drug trafficking. Further, the border regions have especially resisted central authority, in part because smuggling operations have often been an integral part of local economies.¹² However, the region's use as a guerrilla sanctuary and drug trafficking has attracted much of the attention of both US and Colombian counter-drug policy and has been the scene of the heaviest conflict between guerrilla, paramilitary, and government forces. It is within the eastern region that regional spillover and containment is the most pressing issue for countries sharing borders with Colombia.

¹² Richard L. Millet, *Colombia's Conflicts: The Spillover Effects of a Wider War* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 4.



Source: CIA Website, www.cia.gov

Figure 2: Map of Colombia

The Andean Ridgeline, which divides the center of Colombia, is home to the majority of the populace and has been a “compartmentalizing feature of Colombian life that [has] given rise to multiple urban centers”¹³. Almost 75 % or 31 million people live in urban areas, with the majority of Colombia’s population living in the major cities of Bogotá, Medellin, and Cali. It is within the urban centers and the Andean mountain region that the Colombian government has historically focused its attention due to their political and economic importance and limited resources. Currently, these areas are those held most strongly by the government while the insurgents and paramilitaries operate with greater impunity within the rural areas. Political theorists have noted that the integration of Colombia’s many regions into a coherent nation-state has been the principal challenge since independence¹⁴. Geography has been, along with patterns

¹³ William W. Wendel, “Colombia’s Threats to Regional Security,” *Military Review* (May-June 2001): 26.

¹⁴ Gabriel Marcella, and Donald Schulz, *Colombia’s Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), 3.

of economic growth, a compartmentalizing factor in the development of the country along with the fact that both urban and rural elites have found this undesirable for political, economic, and social reasons. Unfortunately, an environment has been created in which the urban and rural populaces have been polarized based upon their respective geography.¹⁵ It is within this vacuum that the guerrillas and paramilitaries have established their roots and exacerbated the divide and autonomy of the rural peasantry, although not commanding a strong popular base. Strategically, the nation must form a stronger bond linking the urban and rural populaces and formulate a plan to integrate, economically and politically, these groups while subjugating them to national authority.

The Political-Economic Problem

Colombia's political culture, i.e. the beliefs, values, norms and ideas of society, has been a detriment to any conflict resolution and will continue to inhibit any form of stability to include complicating factors in uniting the Colombia people against the armed challenges to their state. Colombia, during and after Spanish rule, has been governed by elitism, i.e. people are not born as equals, and thus the elites should rule. This dominant form of political thought has been the nucleus of social and economic marginalization of the populace and a popular theme for rallying support amongst the leftist guerrillas, however, with the marriage of the guerrillas to drug trafficking and their use of extreme forms of violence and terrorism upon the majority of the Colombian people, the guerrillas and paramilitaries no longer have a popular base upon which to rally public or private support. The drug trade has capitalized on this by developing a new group of elites-economic and violent in nature, which have formed bonds with the rural, and

¹⁵ Many Latin American historians and political scientists argue that the Colombian state had never exercise effective control over much of its national territory and nothing approaching the rule of law has existed in many of the rural areas. According to Colombian political scientist Francisco Leal Buitrago, the lack of national integration and a large degree of regional autonomy has characterized the Colombian political environment.

agriculturally based peasantry. Unfortunately, the government's *corporatist*¹⁶ attitude taken in resolving the situation has stripped the ability of outside interest groups to effectively interact with government and, in effect, create popular solutions to ending the armed challenge through political and social discourse.¹⁷

The oligarchy, executive branch, and the military have established the parameters for any form of democratic government in Colombia based upon their interests. Their demonstrated ineffectiveness and vulnerability to corruption especially by the drug trade and paramilitaries is a direct result of their vital interests within Colombia: maintenance of power and wealth in the hands of a few. However, the problem has grown to a level that is no longer ignorable as foreign investment, international scrutiny, and a flood of Colombian refugees have placed severe pressure upon the government to act¹⁸. Any form of effective resolution will have to be enacted by these elements to a level of unity unprecedented by their history. At the strategic level this will require an opening up of the political process to all Colombians, restructuring of the economy to encourage the creation of a large middle-class, and national integration of the country; economically and socially.

Culture of Violence

Perhaps one of the greatest impediments to resolving the problem in Colombia is its culture. At the strategic and operational level the cultural dynamics and capacity for violence that dwell within Colombian society as a whole are critical to understand. Almost since its

¹⁶ Corporatism is defined by the state's regulation and control of the nation's interest groups and their organization by functional or group categories rather than on the basis of individualism or freedom of association. Howard J. Wiarda, and Harvey F. Kline, *An Introduction to Latin American Politics and Development* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 175.

¹⁷ Howard J. Wiarda, and Harvey F. Kline, *An Introduction to Latin American Politics and Development* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 175.

¹⁸ The Colombian foreign ministry reports that more than 565,000 Colombians left during 1996-1998 and have not returned, and more than 65,000 Colombians departed on one-way tickets during the first six months of 1999, the US Embassy in Bogotá reported that its visa application workload had doubled, to 50,000 per month. David Passage, *The United States and Colombia: Untying the Gordian Knot* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000), 5.

independence, Colombia has been a nation where violence was, and is, part of the political and social landscape. Over the past 50 years there has been a growing tolerance within certain segments of Colombian society to use violence as a mean for political ends, provoking counteractions, to include the creation self-defense groups that organize along political, social, and geographic lines in order to respond to violence with violence.¹⁹ The worst period of such violence occurred during the period of *La Violencia* (1948-1958) when the two major political parties, Liberals and Conservatives, waged a civil war against each other that affected the entire country. The greatest impact was within the rural segment of society where the worst violence occurred. During this period an estimated 200,000 people were killed and the impetus for small villages and populations to self-organize into protective groups under the premise of political loyalty was created. This became the nucleus for the FARC, ELN, and AUC. As the period of *La Violencia* ended at the beginning of the 1960s, several leftist groups remained active in the rural areas and the government retreated once again to the urban areas to rebuild the country at the cost of integrating the rural Colombian.

Since the period of *La Violencia*, the violent trend has multiplied several folds. According to statistics completed by both the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, the homicide rates rose from 15 to 92 per 100,000 inhabitants between 1974-1995 and for males between the ages of 14-44 years there was a 1350 percent increase in the murder rate in just 15 years.²⁰ In the rural areas, where the capacity for violence is greatest, men and children are forced to join guerrilla or paramilitary groups and this has caused an internal displacement of Colombians²¹ throughout the country that the government is not capable of responding to. The most disturbing violent trend has been towards those in government. It is within this context that the guerrillas and drug traffickers have utilized terrorism and money to intimidate and corrupt any

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 6.

national attempt to disrupt their operations. The Inter-American Development Bank has conducted extensive surveys to find the degree of corruption and intimidation within the Colombian government and found that over 25% of the members of the judicial branch had reported threats to themselves or their families.²² The important factor is recognizing that there exists, and will exist, some levels of paralysis on the part of the government for increased action against the groups threatening Colombia and a primary reaction, especially amongst the guerrillas and drug cartels will be a stepped up campaign of terror targeting national and local governmental officials.

Drugs and Instability

Colombia is currently the world's principal producer and distributor of "refined cocaine"²³, the vast majority of which (70 percent) is exported to the U.S. market.²⁴ The impact of the drug trade contributes to several complicating factors in resolving the Colombian problem. First, the drug trade has exacerbated the Colombian tendency for violence to unprecedented levels, especially in the major urban centers. Secondly, the violence generated by the drug trade and the territorial battles for cocoa producing regions and transshipment areas has created an enormous refugee problem within Colombia. Thirdly, the drug trade has generated enormous amounts of monies for both the FARC and AUC, according to most sources, several hundred million dollars a year. These factors in total have created an increased pressure on the Colombian government that it is unable to handle with current resources. Finally, the impact of the drug trade has misguided US policy within the region at the expense of the Colombian government.

²¹According to a World Bank Report, *Violence in Colombia*, there are an estimated 450,000 to 1.6 million displaced persons in Colombia. Alejandro Gaviria, and Carmen Pages, *Patterns of Crime Victimization in Latin America* (New York: Inter-American Development Bank, 1999).

²²Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 7.

²³Refined cocaine is defined by a three-stage process. The first-stage is crushing and boiling cocoa leaves, using limewater and kerosene, into a paste. The cocoa paste is then mixed with precursor elements (sulphuric acid, potassium permanganate or sulphur dioxide and ammonium hydroxide, filtered, then dried into a cocaine base. The amalgam is finally dissolved in acetone to form a white precipitate of cocaine hydrochloride, which is trapped, dried, and pressed into bricks for shipping. Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 11.

Since the 1980s the drug cartels have adopted a strategy against those who attempt to disrupt their operations, bribery or terrorism.

With billion of dollars in revenues, Colombian narco-traffickers have bribed, intimidated, kidnapped, and assassinated government leaders, judges, law enforcement and military officials, journalists, citizens, and even soccer players. They have infiltrated and suborned the institutional pillars of regime stability such as the civil bureaucracy, the courts, the police, and the army.²⁵

The drug trade originated as an autonomous organization that capitalized on the geography, people, and chaos within Colombia. “The illegal drug industry began to grow and prosper in the unstable environment of virtually uncontrolled violence, rural poverty, political disarray, and government weakness.”²⁶ Cartels quickly established themselves as powerful men, such as Pablo Escobar and the Ochoa Brothers, created and organized an industry that developed an underground economy that rivaled that of Colombia’s. Once again, violence and corruption were widely used to ward off internal and external threats to the illegal drug trade. In time, however, the drug cartels began attracting the attention of both the guerrillas and paramilitaries because of their security needs and rights to operate in areas not under their control. The economic benefits derived from collaborating with the drug trade provided exponential revenues for their organizations. With the dismantling of the two main drug cartels (Cali and Medellin) in the early 1990s, the industry dispersed and the guerrillas and paramilitaries assumed a greater responsibility of the drug trade, in fact gaining total control of most phases on production in areas such as Caqueta and Meta, where paramilitaries expanded their operations and three new fronts

²⁴ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 11.

²⁵ Max Manwaring, *U.S. Security Policy in the Western Hemisphere: Why Colombia, Why Now, and What Is To Be Done?*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 7.

²⁶ Max Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia: Threat and Response* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 2.

were opened up by the FARC²⁷. The strategic and operational implications of the drug trade and its collusion with both the guerrillas and paramilitaries demands that any approach to solving Colombia's problem must address these organizations as inseparable and therefore US policy must recognize that any campaign cannot be simply counter-drug based. By applying economic, political, informational, and military instruments of power simultaneously, with an emphasis on the assistance of regional neighbors, the synergy of these three organizations may be disrupted.

The Regional Effect

Colombia's problem can in no way be viewed as a unilateral issue for Colombia to solve on its own. The enormity of the problem, its complex organizations, and their ability to utilize financial, criminal, and geographical networks amongst Colombia's neighboring states makes it a regional problem with further international implications. The issue at hand for the neighbors of Colombia has been misguided in the belief that the insurgents, paramilitaries, and the drug trade can be contained within Colombia's borders. However, according to noted experts on the region, Colombia's narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance represents a dual threat to the governmental authority of its neighbors and challenges the central governance of the countries affected. Furthermore, it undermines the vital institutional pillars of regime legitimacy and stability.²⁸ Unfortunately, many of Colombia's neighbors are failing to recognize the linkage between what occurs in Colombia to their respective state and have chosen to ignore the problem.

The issue of "spillover effects" is those most contentious amongst Colombia's neighbors. Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru are witnessing the effects of refugee migration from the rural areas of Colombia into their border frontiers.²⁹ However, every neighbor is being affected by the proliferation of guerrilla, paramilitary, and drug activity within their countries, clearly

²⁷ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 25.

²⁸ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 11.

²⁹ William W. Wendel, "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review* (May-June 2001): 27.

violating territorial boundaries. Colombia does not have the capacity to control its borders, while simultaneously attacking the armed challenge to its state and therefore the responsibility lies within a regional response aimed at assisting Colombia, while tending to each respective countries individual interests. This issue will be discussed in more depth in the development of a regional strategy and operational level considerations, however, the emphasis is made that Colombia's internal war is not confined unto itself.

US Interests and the War on Terrorism

Many question why is the problem in Colombia important to the United States? There are two important reasons, the promotion of democratic governments within the Western Hemisphere, which policymakers believe create secure and stable countries that allow for the second important reason; free-market economic progress. US policy within the hemisphere has always been based upon a theory of security. Instability in Colombia threatens US security. In the post-9/11 world, with the growing capabilities of the narco-guerrillas and narco-terrorists, that threat has multiplied as other outside actors are able to assist the armed groups within Colombia to strike out against the United States should the current counter-drug policy and added monies under Plan Colombia become increasingly successful. Colombia's further importance to the United States over the past two decades has been its government's cooperation in fighting the "drug war" along with the US. In 2001 alone, the US invested over \$863.2 million dollars under plan Colombia to assist the government and its police forces fight against the illicit drug trade.³⁰ Furthermore, Colombia is the US's fourth largest trading partner in Latin America, accounting for over \$10 billion dollars in trade; and provides the fifth largest US export market in Latin America.³¹ Beyond the economic interests in maintaining a democratic Colombia, there are over

³⁰ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 25.

³¹ Manwaring, *U.S. Security Policy in the Western Hemisphere* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 10.

25,000 Americans living and working within the region, although some are dual-nationals³² that are lucrative targets for narco-terrorists and their security clearly remains the responsibility of the US to protect under the new NSS.

In the shadow of 9/11 there are new implications as to the responsibilities of the United States within Colombia. Recently, the State Department placed the FARC, ELN, and AUC on its list of international terrorist organizations. These organizations and the nexus created with the drug trade enable them to strategically and operationally threaten both the United States and its interests. US policy is slowly realizing that previous counter-drug policies and funds directed at their limited operations need to expand in order to properly address the growing threat within Colombia, regionally, and internationally.

³² David L. Passage, *The United States and Colombia: Untying the Gordian Knot*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000), 4.

CHAPTER TWO

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE GUERRILLA GROUPS

The greatest insurgent threat to Colombia is the FARC. The FARC is responsible for the majority of guerrilla violence, narcotrafficking, and violence within Colombia and along the frontier regions in the east of Colombia. There are other guerrilla groups operating within Colombia, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), however, they are relatively much smaller and weaker than the FARC and do not pose the complexity of problems to the Colombian government that the FARC does. The FARC's ability to operate and control the population through fear, intimidation, and presence in the much of the Colombian rural areas provides them significant political-military control of a substantial portion of the country. The FARC do not command popular support in Colombia, however, their force of 15,000 – 20,000 guerrillas, spread throughout Colombia, has given them the ability to influence the local populations through fear and intimidation. They are well resourced in both arms and personnel, and have used the monies from drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion to support their organization. Their objective is to take power in Colombia through armed-conflict.³³

FUERZAS ARMADAS REVOLUCIONARIOS de COLOMBIA (FARC) (REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA)

Origin

The FARC today is a product of the instability within Colombia over the past forty years. The guerrilla group derives its origin from the civil war period, *La Violencia*, which plagued Colombia when the two major political parties battled each other for national control and split the country along the two party lines, the Conservatives and the Liberals. In the later stage of *La*

³³ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001).

Violencia (1958-1966), the government fought a successful counterinsurgency war against the remaining many small pockets of Liberal guerrilla groups throughout the rural areas of Colombia. One small group of leftist fighters arose in the small department (state) of Tolima, led by Manuel Marulanda Velez, “Tiro fijo” or “Sure shot” in English, the current leader of the FARC³⁴. In May 1964 the Colombian Army launched OPERATION MARQUETALIA, aimed directly at destroying Marulanda’s forces. The operation was a success, but Marulanda and several other guerrilla leaders from the Tolima-Cauca-Huila border region escaped into Rio Chiquito³⁵. In 1966, fueled by support from Communist Cuba propaganda war and other regionally motivated communist movements throughout the hemisphere, Marulanda consolidated both communist and noncommunist forces (mostly of rural origin) and created a unified organization know as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)³⁶.

Upon its creation in the later 1960s, the FARC adopted a Maoist strategy of guerrilla warfare³⁷, backed by a Marxist-Leninist political ideology, to conduct war against the Colombian government. Marulanda, as Chief of Staff of the FARC, set the conditions for operations by establishing the first “front”³⁸ within Colombia in 1966. Three years later a second front was opened in the middle Magdalena Valley and the size of the FARC grew to a total of 350 guerrillas³⁹. The decade of the 1970s was a time for limited growth and organization within the FARC-the 1st stage of the Maoist stratagem, however, a third front was established along the

³⁴ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 23.

³⁵ Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as Prologue? A History of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958-1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 29.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ According to Maoist strategy, there are three stages of protracted guerrilla warfare. The 1st stage is a period of survival and a limited expansion of the popular base, strategically, the guerrilla adopts a defensive posture while the enemy or state conducts a strategic offense to eliminate the guerrilla threat. The second stage is a stalemate, where the enemy consolidates to regain momentum and the guerrilla prepares for counteroffensive operations-expanding in size and occupation of territory. The final, or mobile stage is the guerrilla offensive or conventional phase where the enemy is than destroyed or retreats. Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 2nd ed., trans. Samuel B. Griffith II (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992).

³⁸ A front is not a military unit of any particular size; it refers to a guerrilla command operating in a geographic jurisdiction. Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 25.

³⁹ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 24.

Panamanian and Colombian border, the Darien Gap. In order to more effectively operate as a guerrilla group, the FARC established a general staff to organize efforts and added a political branch to develop and produce propaganda for recruiting their most important resource, people within the agriculturally based peasantry.⁴⁰ Their methodology was clearly falling along Maoist lines.

The turning point came for the FARC during the 1980-90s, when they improved upon their capabilities, methodology, and objectives due to increased personnel and resources. In 1982, at the Seventh Conference, the FARC adopted a strategy to expand its existing fronts with the goal of at least one front per department of Colombia-over fifty in total.⁴¹ In 1984, the then President Belisario Betancur, signed a cease-fire agreement with the FARC in order to set conditions for a peaceful negotiation. The cease-fire lasted from 1984-87 and gave the FARC three years to accumulate and consolidate control of needed resources: territory, money, and personnel- an opportunity they would be given again under President Pastrana to once again consolidate and reorganize ten years later. The FARC expanded operations in resource-rich areas that included the cattle region of the eastern plains, commercial agriculture in Uraba and Santander, oil in the middle Magdalena valley, and gold in Antioquia.⁴² The most important area, and a crucial one for the FARC, was the eastern Andes, which gave them control of Colombia's prime cocoa growing regions.

Opposing their expansion into this region were the drug cartels and their hired guns: paramilitaries. The FARC had initial difficulty with their expansion and control of the cocoa regions because their involvement with the drug trade, previously prohibited by their Marxist ideology, would possibly compromise their political objectives. However, the presence of the increasingly powerful drug cartels and their paramilitary forces in the cocoa regions of Caqueta

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Ibid.

and Meta and the lucrative benefits from the drug trade propelled the FARC to respond. The FARC came to a consensus, published in its “Conclusions” to the Seventh Conference, to tax and provide human labor to the drug trade in order to derive the necessary resources to continue their campaign against the Government⁴³. In the past fifteen to twenty years the ties formed between the FARC and the drug trade have proliferated the growth of the organization due to the financial capital they have been able to generate in order to purchase weapons, equipment, and provide limited para-state functions, to include jobs for the poor-agriculturally based workers in the areas under their control. Although, the FARC’s expansion into the drug trade has generated lucrative benefits for them, the loss of political and social capital has been greater, especially in attempting to gather more popular support.

Organization

The FARC, though outnumbered by the Colombian Army, are well trained, equipped, and often achieve greater combat effect with fewer forces and are led by key leaders with twenty to thirty years of experience in guerrilla warfare.⁴⁴ The FARC ‘s military organization is based upon a guerrilla nucleus and its ability to expand and control to the objective size of a “front”. Che Guevara, in his work, *Guerrilla Warfare-A Method*, states, “The guerrilla nucleus, settled in terrain favorable to the struggle, guarantees the security and permanence of the revolutionary command”.⁴⁵ The FARC have used the Cuban Revolutionary example and the writings of Che Guevara to lay out their strategy for the organization of guerrilla forces in Colombia by following his dictum that the:

⁴³ Marcella and Schulz, *Colombia's Three Wars* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 1999), 11.

⁴⁴ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 8.

⁴⁵ Walter Laqueur, *The Guerrilla Reader: A Historical Anthology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), 205.

Guerrilla movement, in its growth period, reaches a point where its capacity for action covers a specific region for which there is a surplus of men and an over concentration in the zone. The bee swarming begins when one of the leaders, an outstanding guerrilla, moves to another region and repeats the chain of developments of guerrilla warfare, subject, of course, to a central command.⁴⁶

This appears to have been their process for military organization during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, however, with their involvement in the drug trade during the 1980s and 1990s, the military organization seems to have changed. According to Manwaring, "because of a general lack of appeal to the Colombian population the insurgents have developed a military organization designed to achieve armed colonization of successive areas within Colombian national territory".⁴⁷

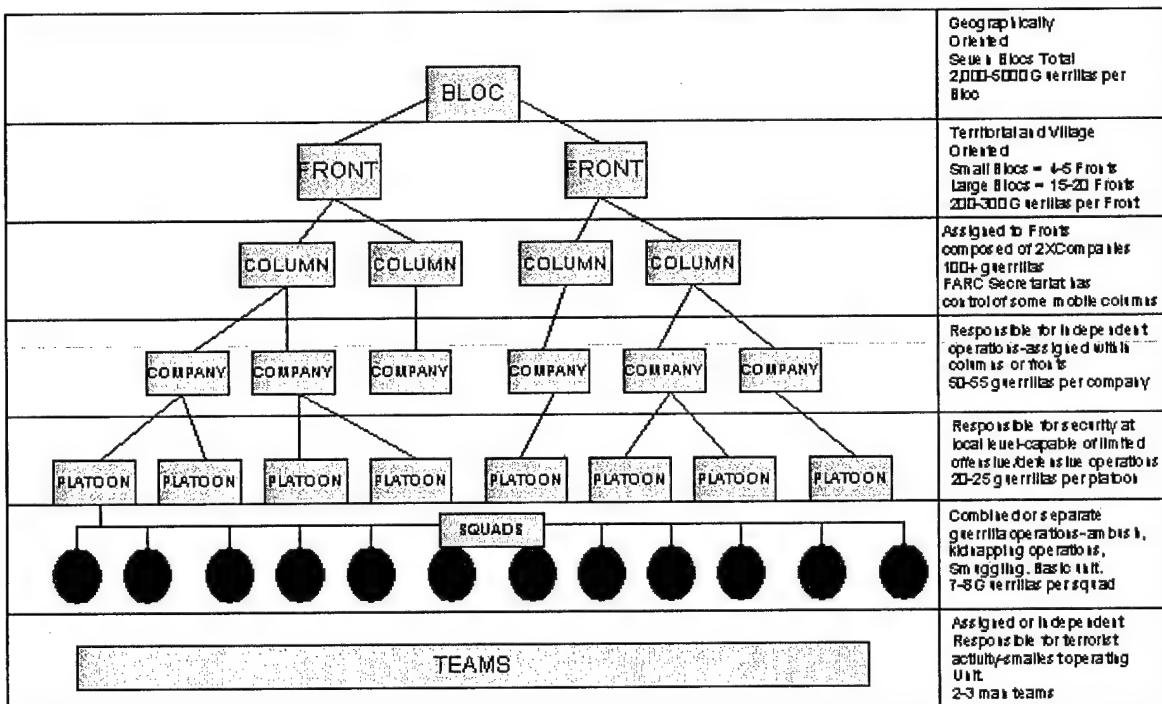


Figure 3: FARC Organization

The purpose of the military organization of the FARC is to survive, expand, and control. The FARC occupy almost 40% of Colombia, according to recent reports. Their desire is to

⁴⁶ Ibid., 209-210.

⁴⁷ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 4.

maintain a presence in as many places possible with their limited numbers and still maintain a level of military capability to respond to paramilitary or government forces. Colombia is divided into “fronts” by the FARC, which are not military units of particular size, but rather guerrilla commands operating within a given geographic jurisdiction.⁴⁸

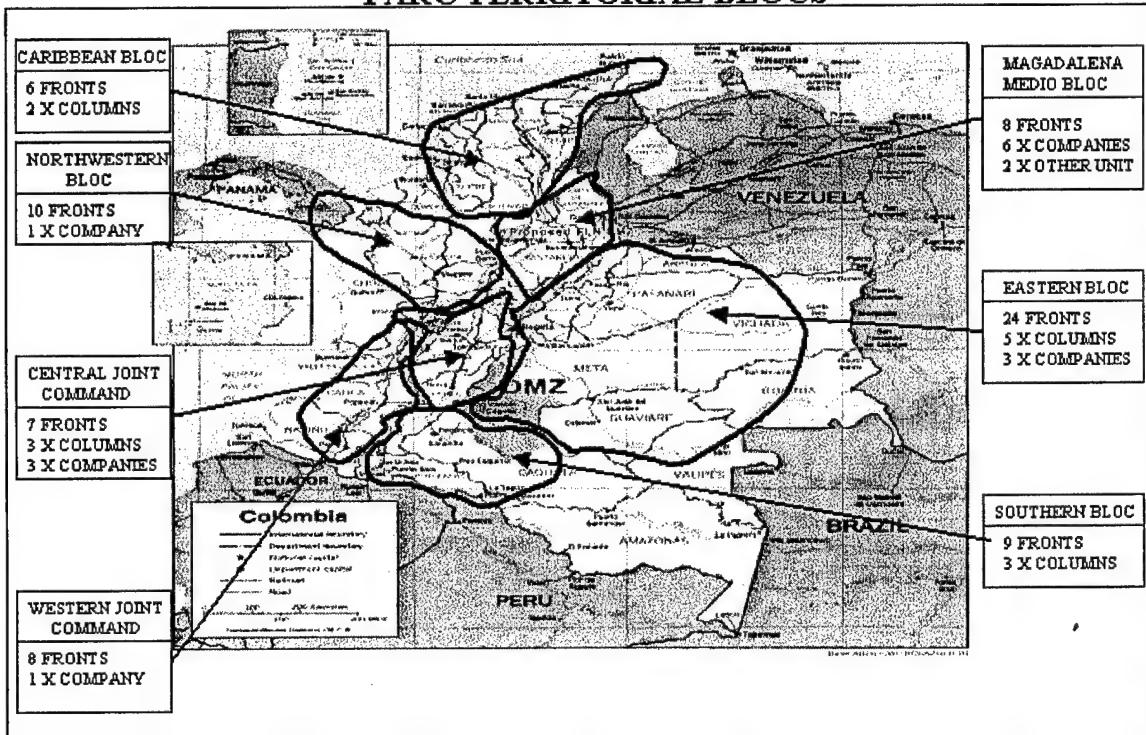
The front, led by a front commander with normally over ten to twenty years of guerrilla experience, has combat, combat support, and other infrastructure elements that enable command and control of his respective area. Within each front are combat units, the primary force being a company or more of guerrilla fighters that can operate from the squad to platoon and company level to conduct guerrilla operations based upon the mission. Companies operating together form columns, however, based upon the importance of the region or front, the number of companies may differ. Columns have proven themselves as effective guerrilla sized forces, responsible for several defeats of Colombian Army forces from 1996-1999.⁴⁹ Currently, the FARC is organized into seven territorial “blocs”, (Caribbean, Northwestern, Magdalena, Eastern, Southern, Central Joint Command, and Western Joint Command). Each bloc has a different amount of fronts, based upon size and importance. According to Angela Rabassa and David Spencer, experts in the guerrilla organization within Colombia, each front also consists of commissions that control intelligence, political matters, public order, mass work projects, and finance that collect taxes.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 25.

⁴⁹ Jeremy McDermott, “Colombia’s Most Powerful Rebels,” *BBC News*, 7 January 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1746777.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003.

⁵⁰ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 24-26.

FARC TERRITORIAL BLOCS



(Combined Source: Rabassa, Angel & Chalk, Peter, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, Colombia FARC site, Strategic Forecasting LLC, 2002.)

Figure 4:FARC Territorial Organization

A new element within the military organization of the FARC is its recruitment of women and teenagers, although not new with the overall world of insurgent warfare, but dynamic within Latin America. Current estimates place the amount of women within the FARC as high as thirty percent and these women are fighters like the men, enduring the same hardships.⁵¹ Women have also been used as great sources of intelligence gathering, in one operation infiltrating a wealthy apartment complex as maids, which was later attacked by other FARC guerrillas who kidnapped 15 people to be later ransomed⁵². The guerrillas are the worst offenders when it comes to recruiting children as combatants. Some children are as young as nine years old.⁵³ Teenagers also

⁵¹ Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force," *BBC News*, 4 January 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1742217.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 18.

seem to comprise the majority of the new recruiting amongst the FARC. This dynamic is not new, because many are either forced to join once the FARC enter an area or they volunteer out of delusions of adventure. Unfortunately, these young guerrillas are easily manipulated to conduct horrific acts against civilian and military targets, and any intervention by the US will have to factor in the idea that US troops may engage women and children on the battlefield that are not non-combatants, but rather the enemy itself.

Strategy

Initially, the strategy for taking power of Colombia was based upon the premise that they could successfully organize and lead a popular uprising of the people, primarily rooted amongst the rural and disenfranchised masses via guerrilla warfare, against the elitist-led Colombian government. However, their search for a mass base has suffered from a lack of popular support due to their leftist political ideology and their involvement with the drug trade. In May 1996, the FARC Commander, Marulanda wrote, "This is not a confrontation of military machines, but rather of classes contending over the political leadership of the country. War has been the consequence of the implacable aggression by the oligarchy against the people rising up in struggle for its liberty."⁵⁴ The lack of popular support has been the greatest problem for the FARC and has forced them to develop an Occidental approach to dominating "the human terrain".⁵⁵ Manwaring furthers equates, specifically, the strategy developed and executed by the FARC as that used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. The grand strategy of the FARC seems to be their incremental expansion within Colombia in order to surround the major cities, defeating threats to their control within the rural areas, and force the government to capitulate. There is no delineation between civilians and military or government forces, and according to such strategy, all Colombians are vulnerable to targeting in order to further the FARCs' believed cause.

⁵⁴ FARC-EP, *Historical Outline* (Colombia: International Commission of the FARC-EP, 1996), 146.

⁵⁵ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 5.

OPERATIONAL DESIGN

Endstate and Military Conditions

The FARC's endstate is to take power in Colombia with its forces in control of all segments of Colombian society. Politically, it wants to establish a socialist state, following Marxist-Leninist ideology while economically it wants to maintain control of the illicit drug economy and continue to produce revenues through an underground economy. The immediate aims expressed in the 1993 "Platform" (and in the 1964 "Agrarian Program of the Guerrillas of the FARC-EP") are concrete steps toward that goal: reorient the economy toward national social needs; genuine and thorough land reform; completely restructure the Armed Forces; a sovereign foreign policy independent of the demands of U.S. imperialism.⁵⁶ The endstate will only be accomplished when it feels it has sufficient military strength, regardless of popular support, to launch offensive operations against government forces and occupy the main urban centers of Colombia.

The FARC's campaign plan is set in a series of stages, following Maoist stratagems, that will allow them to control the entirety of the country by systematically consolidating control of the key economic areas, primarily the agricultural, cocoa producing, and oil pipeline regions in southeastern and northeastern areas of Colombia. Their intent is to then expand operations from the interior to the coastal regions and surround the major urban cities. The FARC have estimated that they require at least 30,000 guerrillas to expand into offensive operations that will be sufficient to defeat Colombian military and police forces.⁵⁷ Once consolidation is complete and the urban areas secure, the final objective is Bogotá in order to force the capitulation of the government.

⁵⁶ FARC-EP, *Historical Outline* (Colombia: International Commission of the FARC-EP, 1996), 146.

⁵⁷ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 27.

ENDSTATES FOR FARC	
POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/INFORMATIONAL CONDITIONS	MILITARY CONDITIONS
SUCCESS -CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT -POPULAR SUPPORT -CONTROL OF DRUG TRADE -RECOGNIZED AS LEGITIMATE POLITICAL PARTY -SOCIALIST STATE ESTABLISHED/NATIONAL INTEGRATION -SEVERED COLOMBIAN TIES W/US -FRIENDLY RELATIONS/ACCEPTANCE WITHIN LATIN AMERICA	-COLOMBIAN ARMY DEFEATED -SECURITY AND POLICE FORCES DEFEATED -PARAMILITARY FORCES DEFEATED -30,000 > FARC FORCES
STATE -PARTICIPATION/BUT NOT CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT -LIMITED POPULAR SUPPORT (LESS THAN 50% IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS) -DRUG TRADE CONTROL SPLIT (CARTELS & PARAMILITARIES) -UNRECOGNIZED AS LEGITIMATE PARTY OUTSIDE OF COLOMBIA -TERRITORY UNDER CONTROL LIMITED TO RURAL AREAS-NO URBAN CENTER CONTROL	- COLOMBIAN FORCES NOT DEFEATED- - CONTROL OF KEY RURAL AREAS (COCOA FIELDS-SMUGGLING ROUTES) REMAIN UNDER FARC CONTROL - PARAMILITARY FORCES NOT DEFEATED CONTINUE TO CONTEST COCOA PRODUCING REGIONS - FARC FORCES LIMITED TO <20,000
FAILURE -FARC DESTROYED -LOSS OF TERRITORIAL CONTROL IN RURAL AREAS (MAGDALENA VALLEY/BORDER REGIONS/SE ANDEAN RIDGELINE) -KEY LEADERS ELIMINATED -DRUG TRADE ELIMINATED	-FARC FORCES DESTROYED, NO GREATER THAN 500-1,000 FORCES REMAIN -REMAINING FORCES ISOLATED TO LESS THAN 10 MEN PER FRONT-INCAPABLE OF CONDUCTING ANY GUERRILLA OPERATIONS -COLOMBIAN FORCES ABLE TO OPERATE AT GREATER THAN BATTALION STRENGTH IN ANY AREA/OCCUPY AND DEFEND

CONDITIONS: GOVERNMENT CONTROL/TERRITORY/POPULAR SUPPORT/DRUG TRADE/EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Figure 5: Endstates for FARC

Center of Gravity/Decisive Points

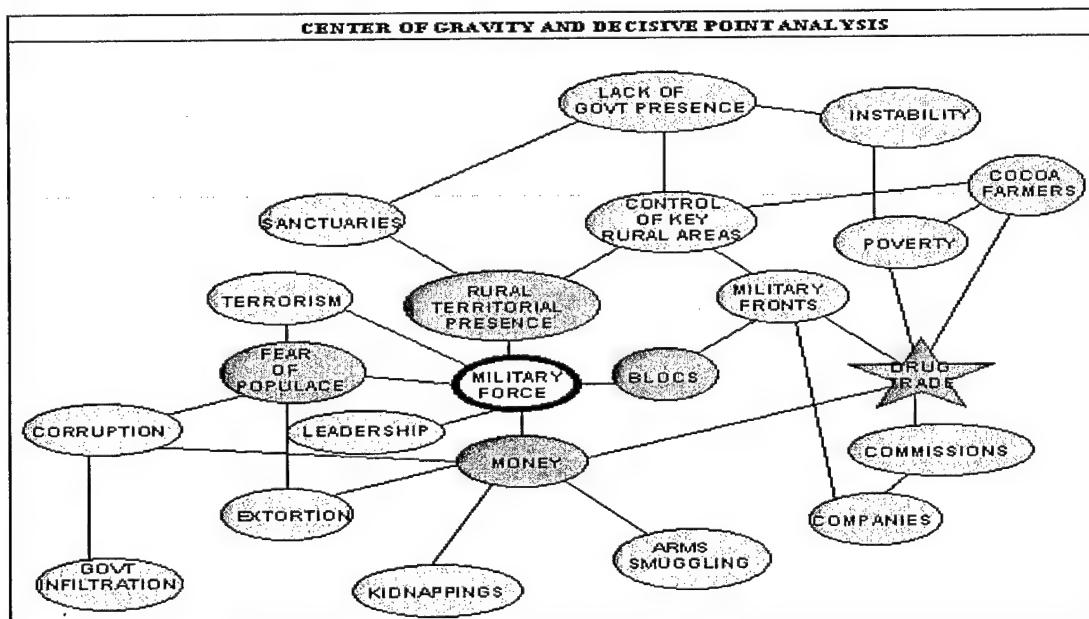


Figure 6: COG and Decisive Point Analysis

It is difficult to allocate an overall center of gravity (COG) for the FARC that meets the Clausewitzian definition of "the hub of all power and movement upon which everything

depends.⁵⁸ Listed in Figure 1 is a graphic depiction of the FARC's COGs and decisive points. The current definition within Joint Doctrine defines the center of gravity as "those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight."⁵⁹ From this basis there are possible FARC centers of gravity that are vulnerable either directly and indirectly which can lead to the defeat of the organization. A decisive point, according to Joint Doctrine, is a "geographic place, specific key event, critical system, or function that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly influence the outcome of an attack."⁶⁰

The FARC's military force, i.e. combined force of 15,000-20,000 guerrillas is the capability that threatens the Colombian government, and therefore, the overall strategic COG that must be destroyed or defeated to a degree where it can no longer affect the security and stability of the country and not be allowed to regenerate-this includes its leadership within the General Secretariat. However, the complexity of the problem within Colombia demands that there will be different COGs selected at the operational level based upon the overall campaign plan and possible phasing of such an operation. The FARC derive their power from four primary sources, their military organization at the "bloc" level, their uncontested presence in a vast portion of Colombia, the large amounts of money they derive from their terrorist and narco-guerrilla operations, and the fear they have installed within the Colombian people.

Therefore, there are four operational COGs that need to be attacked indirectly or directly based upon the campaign plan and chosen lines of operations. The first COG is the military organization at the "bloc" level. Blocs are geographic in nature and allow for the command and control of various fronts within its area of operation. At the operational level, blocs serve as the

⁵⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁵⁹ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1-02: Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: DOD, 2001) 70.

controlling agent and must be attacked from an operational level; this includes attacking their leadership, subunit organizations, and established presence in a given area. Rural territorial presence is one of the strongest centers of gravity for the entire FARC. The lack of governmental presence in the majority of rural Colombia (a decisive point) has given a great advantage to the guerrillas and their freedom of action. Based upon this freedom of action they have been able to take control of the drug trade, terrorize the populace, prepare and conduct operations against military, police, governmental, and civilian targets, and gain time to grow. Attacking this COG will require an indirect and direct approach at all levels of war in order to be successful.

Fear of the populace is a COG that is of strategic and operational significance. The ability of the FARC to use terror and intimidation to their advantage has created an extremely volatile situation within the entire country of instability. This fear also provides a populace and lower-level governmental infrastructure that has been unable to respond effectively against FARC actions. As an example, numerous governmental officials have been assassinated following their election-138 mayors and 569 members of parliament, deputies, and city council members were murdered between 1989-1999, along with 174 public officials in other positions.⁶¹

Money is the final COG because it provides some obscurity in determining the overall objectives of the FARC. The FARC's financial situation is perhaps their greatest strength, especially in relation to the financial situation of the government and the populace. Their financial capital and objectives allow them to spend millions of dollars on weaponry, from machine guns to anti-aircraft rockets, to providing aid within villages under their control, to bribing officials and military leaders. The preponderance of funds that the FARC receives is from the drug trade (the key decisive point in the financial COG), although they generate large amounts from extortion, kidnapping, and other activities. However, by nature of their

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 13.

involvement within the drug trade it argues that unless separated from this trade and its lucrative funds, there is no need for their immediate success on the strategic level because taking power in Colombia may force them to divorce themselves politically from this illicit activity for international recognition and thus lose hundreds of millions of dollars a year in revenue. According to a report by the BBC on the FARC's financing, "they make at least 300 million dollars from the drug trade a year, added to which is their income from kidnapping and extortion, making them probably the richest insurgent group on the world."⁶²

Lines of Operation

At the tactical and operational level, the FARC can operate on both interior and exterior lines of operations based upon their ability to conduct guerrilla warfare within both the urban and rural area of Colombia. However, more important for future planning, at the operational level the FARC operate from several different lines of operations, these are military, political, territorial, financial, and criminal. No amount of tactical successes by Colombian or US forces can defeat the FARC without attacking these lines of operation from the strategic and operational level.

The military line of operation for the FARC is overall defensive in nature, until they can recruit and train a force sufficient enough to commence large-scale offensive operations against the Colombian military. The FARC operate in small units, with the squad to company being the levels most effective to conduct military operations, drug trafficking, terrorist attacks, kidnappings, and occupation of village areas. The front serves as the command, delineating geographic jurisdiction.⁶³ The bloc encompasses the territorial jurisdiction and commands and controls the fronts operating within its area; it also has assigned independent companies and mobile columns, some under the direct control of the FARC secretariat for use as reserves.⁶⁴ Thus

⁶² Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Most Powerful Rebels," *BBC News*, 7 January 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1746777.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003.

⁶³ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

the military has the capability to expand its forces and operations within areas based upon the situation.

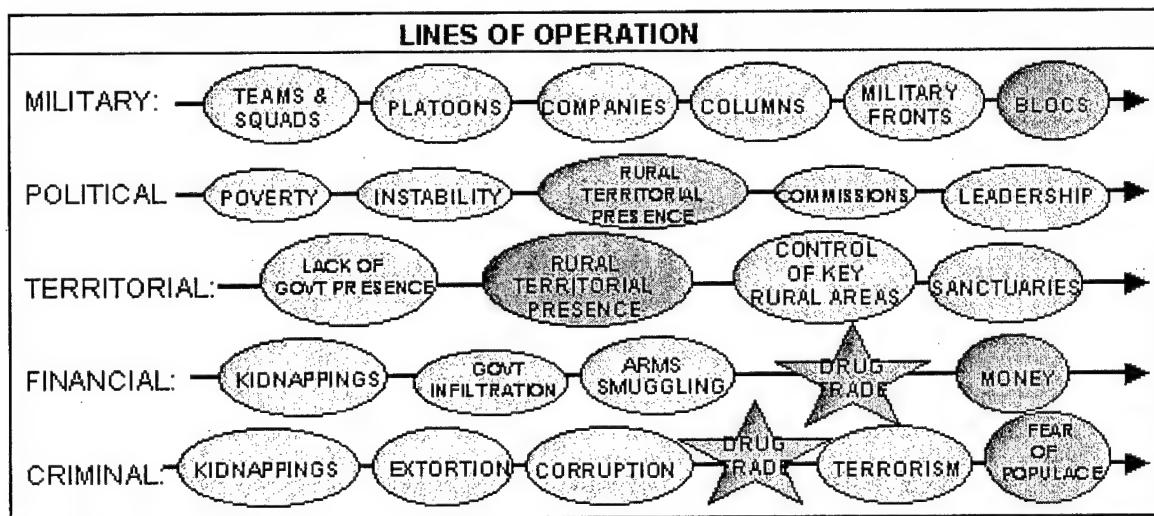


Figure 7: Lines of Operation

Culminating Point

The point of culmination for the FARC will be when they are either destroyed or witness a large number of defeats in tactical and operational level engagements to which they cannot win nor survive to fight another day. "Yet the FARC still believe they can take power by force, and until they are shown that this is an impossibility they are unlikely to negotiate peace in earnest feeling, [they feel] they can achieve more on the battlefield [than] at the peace table."⁶⁵

Operational Reach, Approach, and Pauses

It is difficult to ascertain the operational reach of the FARC due to a lack of credible information. However, it is clear that they can operate effectively as a guerrilla force throughout the majority of Colombia and along its border regions. In being labeled an international terrorist organization by the State Department, the United States recognized that the FARC- to include the

⁶⁵Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Most Powerful Rebels," *BBC News*, 7 January 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1746777.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003.

paramilitaries, have an operational reach that goes beyond the physical borders of Colombia.⁶⁶

Their involvement within the drug trade has greatly added to both their reach and approach at the operational and tactical levels due to the weaponry and military expertise they are able to tap into with the financial resources gained from drug trafficking.

Recent examples of international incidents involving attempts by the FARC to expand their military capabilities were the arrests of three members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), with bomb expertise, who were in Colombia meeting with FARC guerrillas, a visit by Iranian advisors to the former demilitarized zone, and regional governments' seizures of several shipments of assault rifles from the Middle East to the Colombian guerrillas.⁶⁷ The FARC has had two operational pauses since beginning operations in earnest since the 1980s. The last pause occurred when, for three years, beginning in 1998, they were granted a demilitarized zone in turn for peace talks with the government under former President Pastrana. The three-year period gave the FARC time to consolidate, train, and plan future operations. The FARC used the area known as the *Despeje* to launch a major offensive against the Colombian military in November 1999.⁶⁸ The increase in terrorist activities in several of Colombia's major cities suggest that the FARC are using their operational reach to expand operations, primarily terrorist and small unit guerrilla attacks, from their rural strongholds into the major cities along the Andean Ridgeline.

Simultaneous and Sequential Operations

The FARC are capable of conducting both simultaneous and sequential operations, although more effectively at the platoon and company level. Guerrilla attacks against military and police forces, stations, and key individuals have been conducted successfully for the past decade,

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Army Commander Discusses Security Needs for Colombia," *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041104.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

⁶⁷ Luz E. Nagle, *Plan Colombia: Reality of the Colombian Crisis and Implications for Hemispheric Security* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 38-39.

such as the FARC's defeat of the Colombian Army's elite counterinsurgency brigade in 1998 at El Billar, and the October 1998 attack against a police garrison at Mitu, deep within the Amazon Basin.⁶⁹ The FARC have also been able to conduct simultaneous operations against their biggest threat outside the Colombian government, the paramilitaries of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).⁷⁰ The efforts of the FARC, especially in the aftermath of the failed peace process with former President Pastrana, seem to be towards simultaneous operations against Colombian military-security forces and paramilitary forces in concert with terrorist and criminal actions against civilian and government targets throughout the areas of operations. These actions include urban sectors such as Bogotá, Medellin, and Cali in order to further destabilize the government. In a recent report, Commandante 'Romana' Commander 53rd Front, was heard to say: "Bring them all down-bridges, pylons and the dam. Make urban attacks so that the oligarchy feels the war."⁷¹

Linear and Non-linear Operations

In June 2002 the FARC announced that it would kill or kidnap the country's mayors and municipal judges if they do not resign. On June 5, 2002 the FARC assassinated the mayor of the Colombian town of Solita.⁷² It is clear that the FARC believe and are extremely efficient in conducting non-linear operations. As an experienced guerrilla movement, and their slow transition into narco-guerrillas/terrorists, they do not operate along linear patterns. The FARC follow the Maoist dictum of prolonged guerrilla warfare, set upon a series of stages that promote

⁶⁸ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 10.

⁶⁹ Marcella and Schulz, *Colombia's Three Wars* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 1999), 10-11.

⁷⁰ Jeremy McDermott, "Analysis: Colombia's Security Crisis," *BBC News*, 4 May 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1968503.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003 BBC News Report, *Analysis: Colombia's Security Crisis*, BBC News, May 4, 2002.

⁷¹ Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Most Powerful Rebels," *BBC News*, 7 January 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1746777.stm>; Internet; accessed 9 January 2003 McDermott, Jeremy, *FARC: Rebels without a Cause?* BBC News, May 21, 2002.

⁷² U.S. Department of State, "OAS Calls Threats Against Colombian Mayors an Attack on Democracy," *Washington File*, 27 June 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02062704.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

non-linearity over conventional means. The critical point is that conventional linear approaches to defeating the FARC will not work. Although the FARC's involvement and dedication to controlling drug trafficking may provide some weakness to their military flexibility if threatened, planning must optimize non-linear thinking, as the FARC does.

Tempo

The current tempo of operations is high for the FARC. Two key issues have forced the FARC to increase its' tempo of operations, the failed peace process with President Pastrana, who, on February 20, ended the demilitarized zone and the government of Colombia's peace talks with the FARC and the recent election of President Uribe. According to the Colombian government, the immediate catalyst for Pastrana's action was the FARC's hijacking of a civilian aircraft and its subsequent kidnapping of the President of the Peace Commission in the Colombian Senate. Furthermore, President Pastrana gave orders to the Colombian armed forces to regain control of the demilitarized zone occupied by FARC guerrillas.⁷³ The FARC also stepped up attacks on military and police targets, bombed key economic infrastructure, and refused to participate in good faith peace talks.⁷⁴ Following the election of President Uribe and in response to his campaign pledge to use military force to end the insurgency and narco-terrorism in Colombia, the FARC attacked with mortars the inauguration ceremony, wounding several civilians.⁷⁵ With pressure increasing amongst Colombians, regional neighbors, and the United States for the Colombian government to resolve their complex problem, the FARC have responded by stepping up the tempo of their operations in order to discredit the Uribe government, Plan Colombia, and any further US involvement.

⁷³ U.S. Department of State, "State Department Spokesman on Breakdown of Peace Talks in Colombia," *Washington File*, 22 February 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/peace22.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State, "US Army Commander Discusses Security Needs for Colombia," *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041105.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

⁷⁵ Scott Wilson, "Rebel Attack Seen As Grim Harbinger For Colombians," *The Washington Post*, 9 August 2002, p. A14.

Summary

Militarily, the FARC are a well-trained, resourced organization that is capable of conducting a range of operations at various levels throughout Colombia. They are well organized and led by experienced commanders, which has allowed them to defeat the Colombian armed forces and paramilitaries in several engagements. The FARC, however, are not popular within the country and do not command much support outside of their ranks and the rural areas in which they operate. The involvement of the FARC in the drug trade has diluted their political ideology and further reinforced their objective to overthrow the government or maintain a stalemate situation; in either case they retain their power and freedom of action. It is unlikely that a peaceful settlement can be made with the FARC until they feel they have no other option, this will require tactical and operational successes on the battlefield.

CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE PARAMILITARY GROUPS

The formation of the paramilitaries is a direct cause of the social and political development of Colombia, which encouraged the organization of self-defense groups in response to threats at the local and municipal level in the absence of government and police forces. The brothers Fidel and Carlos Castano in Uraba, to avenge the kidnapping and murder of their father by the FARC in 1981, formed one of the first paramilitary groups of significance today, the Autodefensas Campesinas de Cordoba y Uraba (ACCU).⁷⁶ Since the 1980s, the paramilitaries have formed in reaction to two key elements, the threat posed by the leftist guerrillas and the need by drug cartels for protection against rival drug traffickers and the guerrillas. Today these groups are a significant non-state actor contributing to the instability and violence within Colombia and pose a serious threat to the future stability of the country due to their linkages with the drug trade and demonstrated capacity for extreme violence against civilian populations. The largest paramilitary organization, and most threatening to Colombian security, is the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) or United Self Defense Groups of Colombia.

AUTODEFENSAS UNIDAS DE COLOMBIA (AUC) (UNITED SELF DEFENSE FORCES OF COLOMBIA)

The AUC, headed by Fidel Castano, is the major paramilitary organization, with an estimated 9,000-11,000 members. The AUC's professed purpose is to destroy the leftist guerrillas and gain political legitimacy through the organization and unity of the various paramilitary

⁷⁶ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 55.

subgroups spread throughout the country.⁷⁷ The AUC views its organization as a stepping block to political legitimacy and acceptability in national politics. They have become a threat to the Colombia because they exact their own form of justice in areas not controlled by the government against the guerrillas, and have recently developed strong ties with the drug trade, further complicating a proper response by the government to neutralize them.⁷⁸ In September 2001 they were labeled a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.⁷⁹ Colombia's complex problem cannot be solved at any level without addressing the rising threat posed by the paramilitaries towards the government's ability to protect its populace and control its territory and their role as the third non-state actor within the Colombian "Hobbesian Trinity".

Origin

Similar to the FARC, the paramilitaries were a reaction to the period of *La Violencia*, when self-protective groups were formed at the local level within areas of Colombia where the government could not provide security and there existed an absence of law. Some paramilitary groups were even organized as civil defense groups by the government itself during the 1960s and 1970s. A 1964 civil defense law allowed the creation of civil defense units to support the army in counter-insurgency.⁸⁰ During the 1980s many paramilitaries were supported and financed by large landowners and cattle-ranchers as a result of guerrilla incursions into their lands. The guerrillas entered key agricultural areas to derive economic benefits from illegally taxing the estate owners and workers. The Castano brothers became key figures in the right-wing paramilitary movement as they attempted to fill the void left by the government in providing security and stability in many rural, and some urban, areas where the guerrillas' influence was pervasive. The two brothers started out as guides for the army in counter-insurgency operations

⁷⁷ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 9.

⁷⁸ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 53-55.

⁷⁹ Jeremy McDermott, "US Imposes Sanctions on Colombian Paramilitary," *BBC News*, 10 September 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/americas/1536210.stm>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

⁸⁰ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 53.

and then organized their own paramilitary group, Peasant Self Defense Forces of Cordoba and Uraba (ACCU), but were later ordered to disband it due to political disagreement of the paramilitaries use as government proxy forces.⁸¹ FARC guerrillas killed Fidel Castano sometime in the mid-1990s and his brother, Carlos, organized together the various paramilitary groups throughout the country, under his leadership, as the Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC); an estimated 3,000-5,000 fighters total at that time.

The paramilitaries began as self-defense organizations for the protection of family, property, and the law and order of a given geographical area.⁸² Many developed links with the major drug cartels within Colombia as small protective armies against leftist guerrillas and rival drug traffickers.⁸³ Allegations of these groups' involvement with the drug trade resulted in their being outlawed by the Colombian government, although evidence exists that their focus on eliminating the FARC guerrillas drew support from several in the military ranks. However, with the explosion of the drug trade within Colombia, and the rising challenges posed by the guerrillas for control of cocoa producing agricultural areas, they established permanence amongst both the populace and the drug trade. Since 1997, the paramilitaries have tripled in size and are actively engaged in some of the fiercest battles between the guerrillas over control of territory, drugs, and power where there does not exist any presence of the Colombian government. One source notes, "according to the Center for Defense Information, the AUC's membership has tripled in the last three years, mainly due to its deepening involvement in the Drug Trade. The AUC is reportedly growing about five times as fast as the FARC."⁸⁴ Regardless, the paramilitaries derive some level of support, or rather, complacency from the populace but their means of achieving success and

⁸¹ The Associated Press, "Top Colombian Death Squad Chieftain Believed Dead," *CNN*, 28 December 1998; available from <http://rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/guerrilla/castano.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

⁸² Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 6.

⁸³ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 9.

⁸⁴ "Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia," *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 2002; available from http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm; Internet; accessed 4 March 2003.

growing relationship with the drug trade has turned some of these groups from defenders of the people into narco-terrorists like the guerrillas.

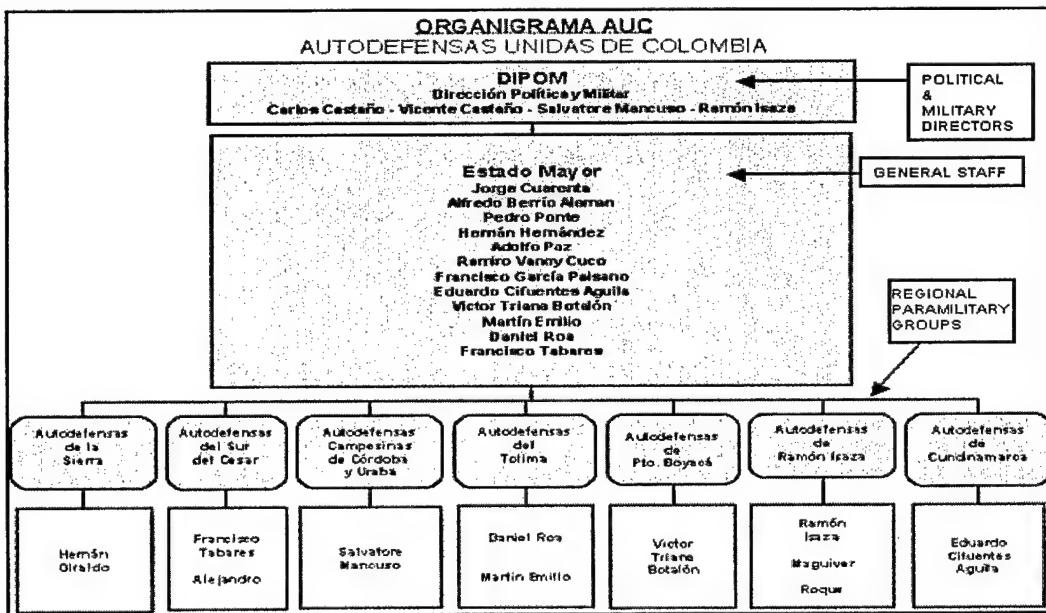
Organization

The AUC is the umbrella organization for the several semi-autonomous regional alliances relatively independent of each other.⁸⁵ The AUC is not as cohesive and well organized as the leftist guerrillas, nor do they share the guerrillas' sophistication in weapons, communications, and resources. This seems due to their basic composition of local militia and village self-defense forces run by local warlords. Although the founding of the AUC brought to some degree "central coordination, funding, and doctrine",⁸⁶ they are more locally and regionally focused and thus unable to match the numerical superiority, training, and experience of their enemy in major encounters. Castano is attempting to close this gap by developing a national concerted effort and national paramilitary strategy. According to an interview conducted with him in 2001 by the Washington Post, Castano expressed concern about the exponential growth of the AUC, stating, "that our growth does not give us enough time to train our commanders sufficiently well, and thus it could get out of our hands. Military excesses could come about."⁸⁷

⁸⁵Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 6.

⁸⁶Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 54.

⁸⁷ Scott Wilson, "Interview with Carlos Castano, Head of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *The Washington Post*, 5 March 2001, p. A10.



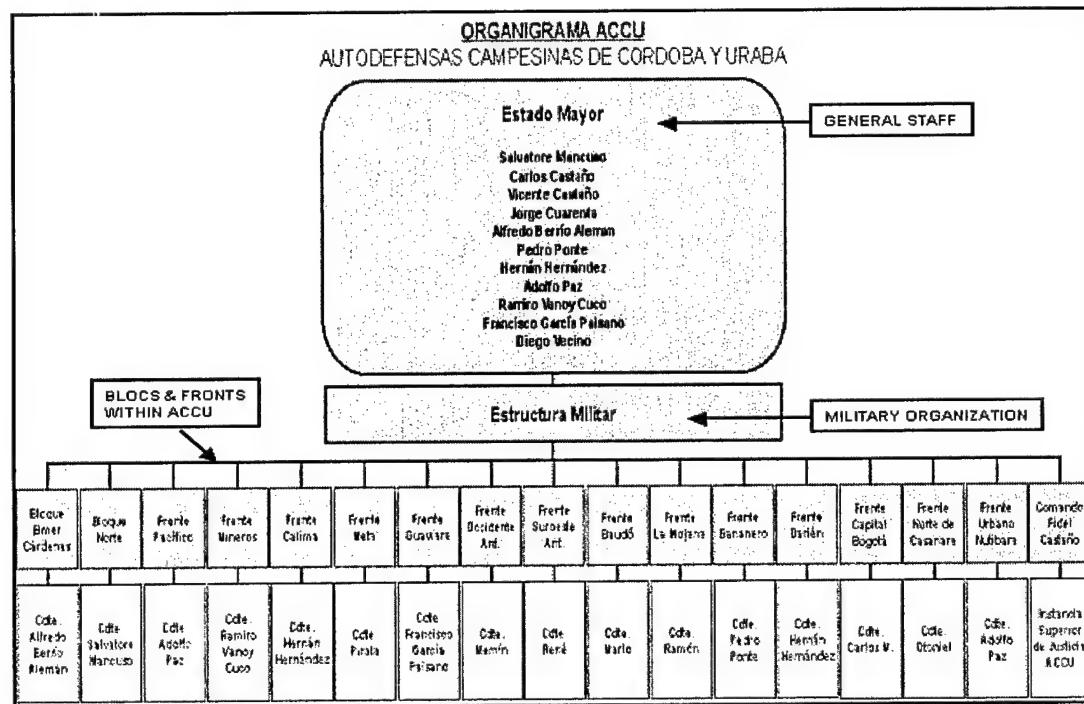
(Source: AUC Website, www.colombia-libre.org, February 2002)

Figure 8: Organization Chart of AUC

The AUC is organized as a confederation of various regional paramilitary commands, although it does not include all of the paramilitary organizations operating either against the guerrillas or protecting the drug trade. The leadership of the AUC is comprised of a Political and Military Directorate, (DIPOM) (See Figure 7). Subordinate to the AUC is the general staff and the separate regional commands. There are a total, according to the AUC's own Website and organizational chart, seven listed regional commands. Each regional paramilitary organization is commanded by a central leader, whose names are depicted on Figure 8, beneath the leadership is a general staff. The military structure of each regional command is composed of blocs and fronts, much like the FARC; however, little information is available on these exact subordinate organizations. Based upon the training and level of military experience within the AUC, which has a few hundred former non-commissioned officer and junior officers, it may be assumed that they are organized into the standardized military organization of squads, platoons, and companies.⁸⁸ Further, each subordinate paramilitary command is organized by blocs and fronts

⁸⁸ Ibid.

based upon their size and geographic orientation.⁸⁹ Unlike the FARC, there is not a subordination of fronts to blocs, the chain of command falls under regional commanders, which are based upon geographical locations.



Source: AUC Website, www.colombia-libre.org, February 2002

Figure 9: Organization Chart of ACCU

Strategy

The mission statement of the AUC, published in its philosophical foundations of the AUC, states, "The United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC) is a political and military organization, whose mission is to finish the terrorist actions of the guerrilla, that are destroying the Colombian people, and to continue to the building of a free, just, worthy and peaceful nation."⁹⁰ The strategy of the AUC is to eliminate leftist guerrillas and seek national political legitimacy by attempting to extend control at the local level and to exercise political influence

⁸⁹ Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, "Organizational Basis," *Colombia Libre*, 2002; available from <http://www.colombia-libre.org/colombiaeng/organizational.asp>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2003.

through the control or intimidation of local officials.⁹¹ The AUC's strategy dictates that its forces "dispute control of the drug-producing areas where the guerrillas have their main source of income".⁹² The problem with their strategy is that it is built upon the premise that the AUC has the capability to command and control the regional commands at a national level. The AUC has had great difficulty in maintaining this policy due to the loose confederation it has formed, external scrutiny of its methods, and differences over objectives between the regional commands and the AUC leadership-especially involvement at the regional level with drug trafficking. These fractions and political pressure from the newly elected President Uribe forced the Castano to temporarily disband the AUC's leadership in August of 2002. In a summit by the AUC leadership and regional commanders, a few months later, Castano re-established the national federation due to increased attacks by the FARC guerrillas on paramilitary groups.⁹³

The dilemma facing the paramilitaries is how to retain a coalition of the various paramilitaries in an environment where armed-opposition by the Colombian armed forces is a tacit policy of the government, regional segmentation and lack of unity negates their combat effectiveness at the operational level, and their poor appearance amongst international organizations for human rights abuses and tactics is degrading their attempts for political legitimacy.⁹⁴ One report from the Center of International Policy in Washington stated "The paramilitaries are responsible for about 75 percent of all politically motivated killings and the vast majority of forced displacements in Colombia."⁹⁵ The need to maintain close ties with the drug trade in order to financially resource the paramilitaries is also a strategic and operational level

⁹⁰ Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, "Philosophical Foundations of the AUC," *Colombia Libre*, 2002; available from <http://www.colombia-libre.org/colombiaeng/organizational.asp>; Internet; accessed 7 February 03.

⁹¹ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 55.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹³ Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's AUC Seeks New Image," *BBC News*, 8 September 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/americas/2245188.stm>; Internet; accessed 3 March 2003.

⁹⁴ Associated Press, "Colombian Government Troops Kill 20 Rebel Fighters," *The New York Times*, 10 August 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1304113.stm>.

⁹⁵ "Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia," *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 2002; available from http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm; Internet; accessed 4 March 2003.

dilemma for the AUC, to which they have been unable to divorce themselves. In an interview conducted with the AUC leader, Carlos Castano, "recently admitted in open press that his group receives payments-similar to the taxes levied by the FARC-from cocoa growers in southern Colombia in exchange for protection from guerrillas."⁹⁶ Key strategic areas such as Guaviare, Putumayo, and Caqueta have become heavily contested regions between the FARC and the AUC because of their importance as drug producing areas that support the FARC, but whose control could greatly assist the AUC, politically and economically. Consequently, the AUC's strategy to eliminate the guerrillas and "cleanse" areas of suspected guerrilla sympathizers while simultaneously contesting control of drug producing areas has further hampered attempts by the Colombian government to reestablish stability and security within the country.

OPERATIONAL DESIGN

Endstate and Military Conditions

Due to the complexities of the paramilitaries: lack of unity, extreme use of violence, lack of political legitimacy, and criminal activity, the AUC's endstate is difficult to ascertain. Success for the AUC is based upon the leaderships' ability to unify the organization, develop a concerted strategic and operational level plan with achievable objectives that will allow it to work with the government in order to defeat the FARC and other leftist guerrillas. In order for it to do this, the AUC has to eliminate ties with the drug trade, and achieve some form of political viability within the context of the current problem in Colombia. Stalemate will be a continuation of the current situation within Colombia amongst the various actors and a continuing lack of unity within the paramilitaries. Failure clearly coincides with the military and/or political defeat of the AUC.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

ENDSTATES FOR AUC		
	POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/INFORMATIONAL CONDITIONS	MILITARY CONDITIONS
S U C C E S S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -POPULAR SUPPORT -SEPARATION FROM DRUG TRADE -RECOGNIZED AS LEGITIMATE POLITICAL PARTY -FRIENDLY TIES W/UNITED STATES -FRIENDLY RELATIONS/ACCEPTANCE WITHIN LATIN AMERICA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -FARC DEFEATED -COLOMBIAN ARMY ALLIES -MILITARY ARM POISED FOR DISBANDING -TRANSFER OF CONTROL TO MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES
S T A L E M A T E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NON-PARTICIPATION WITHIN GOVERNMENT -LIMITED POPULAR SUPPORT (LESS THAN 50% IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS) -DRUG TRADETIES SPLIT (REGIONAL COMMANDS & AUC LEADERSHIP) -CONTINUED RECOGNITION BY US AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION -TERRITORIAL DISPUTES REMAIN IN CRITICAL AREAS BETWEEN FARC AND AUC (FARC UNDEFEATED) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -COLOMBIAN FORCES PURSUE AUC -FARC FORCES NOT DEFEATED-CONTINUE TO CONTEST COCOA PRODUCING REGIONS -AUC UNABLE TO CONSOLIDATE ALL PARAMILITARY GROUPS UNDER UNIFIED COMMAND -OPERATIONS LIMITED TO REGIONAL AND LOWER LEVEL
F A I L U R E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -AUC LEADERSHIP AND UNIFIED CONTROL DESTROYED -LOSS OF TERRITORIAL CONTROL IN RURAL AREAS (URABA AND CORDOBA/PUTUMAYO/CAQUETA) -LIMITED POPULAR & GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT LOST -DRUG TRADETIES FORTIFIES DIVISIONS AMONGST GROUPS/ELIMINATES UNITY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -AUC & REGIONAL GROUPS DESTROYED, < 500-1,000 FORCES REMAIN UNDER AUC CONTROL -FARC FORCES DEFEAT AND EXPEL AUC PRESENCE IN KEY AREAS, UNABLE TO CONTEST CONTROL WITHIN COLOMBIA -COLOMBIAN FORCES FOCUS MAIN EFFORT AGAINST AUC NOT FARC AND ELN

CONDITIONS: GOVERNMENT CONTROL/TERRITORY/POPULAR SUPPORT/DRUG TRADE/EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Figure 10: Endstates for AUC

Center of Gravity/Decisive Points/Lines of Operation

The center of gravity for the AUC is its leadership, primarily Carlos Castano. Without the AUC leadership there will be a fragmentation of the paramilitaries and the possible disintegration of the AUC as a national coalition of the various paramilitary commands. Four critical areas (decisive points) to the AUC that need to be maintained at the operational level, critical for its survival and success are the regional commands subordination to the AUC, financial support, limited popular support from the populace, and political legitimacy. These decisive points affect the AUC and influence the lines operation that the AUC are operating within (Command and Control, Popular Support, Political Legitimacy, Resources) will lead to its success or failure.

The first DP (Regional Commands) is a requirement by the AUC in order to control key areas in either the absence of the government or presence of the FARC through the organization of military blocs and fronts that have the capacity to conduct offensive or defensive operations. The line of operation flows from the command and control the AUC is allowed to exert from a

national level to the regional commands via strategy, leadership, objectives, and regional support. Second, the limited support of the populace (DP) is a necessity in order to assist in the support of the AUC and its strategic objectives. Manwaring notes that, “because of the AUC’s orientation against the insurgents and the willingness to provide fundamental justice and personal security to those defined as “non-collaborators” with the insurgents, they have consistently improved their standing in the Colombian society.”⁹⁷ The popular support line of operation directs the paramilitary’s ability to influence the populace, provide a presence in the absence of law, and dictate the tactics used by the AUC to maintain control within key areas. The third DP, political legitimacy, reflects the AUC’s national strategy to provide a cohesive bond in order to gain, and maintain in some segments, the Colombian government’s support. The political legitimacy line of operation focuses on the AUC’s ability to organize, develop, and promote organizational viability that can work in unison with the government’s attempts to solve its complex problem while seeking legality and acceptability of the AUC as a political actor within Colombia. Finally, the AUC’s financial resources is decisive in that in order to expand the organization and challenge the FARCs’ capabilities, the AUC must deny funds to the FARC, i.e. drug trade, protect key elite interests in order to receive funds, and resource their own organization and subordinate commands. It is along this basis that the resource line of operation operates, however, the marriage of the paramilitaries and the drug trade is the critical node wherein the fragmentation of the organization may or may not come about. “The internal divisions are not a matter of our fast growth, but of the penetration of narco-trafficking that managed to corrupt and buy some of our regional commanders,” stated Castano at a meeting with key leaders of the AUC in September

⁹⁷ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 6.

2002.⁹⁸ The AUC's involvement with the drug trade will be critical to its success as articulated by the AUC leadership.

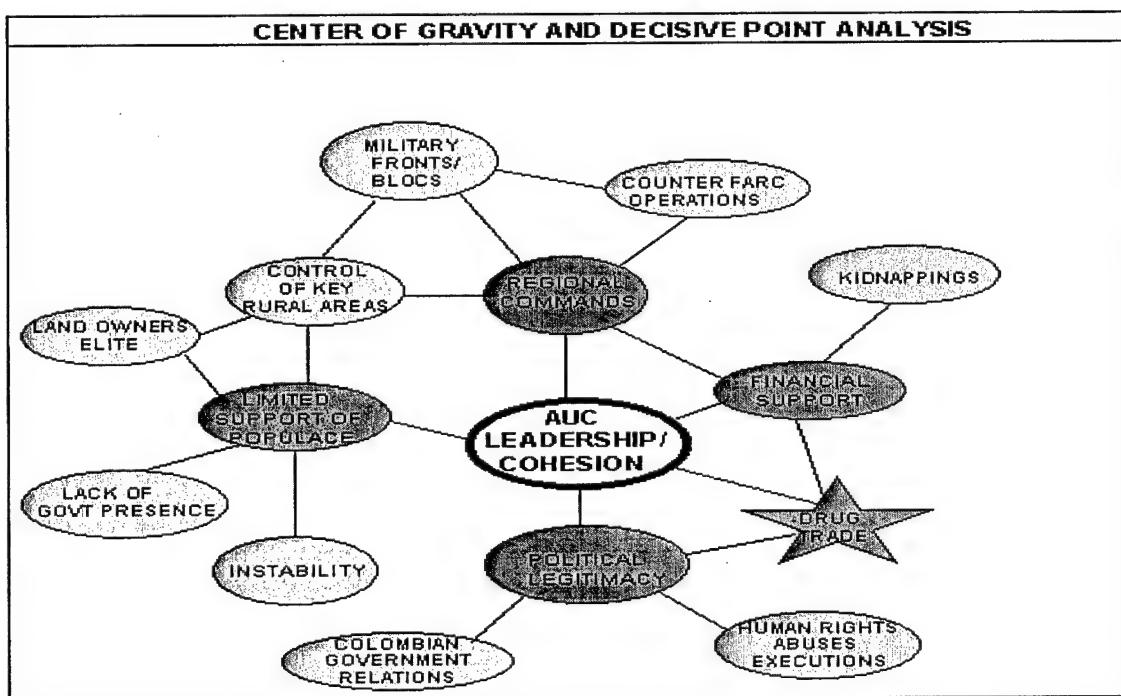


Figure 11: COG Analysis of AUC

Culminating Point

The AUC's culminating point will be reached when it no longer can maintain control of the paramilitaries or it cannot gain legitimacy as a possible legal political actor within Colombia. At that point it will either fragment into independent paramilitary groups or reshape its political objectives in order to take power within Colombia forcefully.

Much of the AUC's current troubles can be explained by the importance it has placed on drug trafficking to finance what has been its rapid expansion of recent years. Fed by increasing middle- and upper-class anxiety over the course of the war, the AUC's tripling in size over the past three years has weakened Castano's hold over the group, spurred human right abuses and likely made his past pledge to disarm member once peace is achieved an unrealistic one.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Scott Wilson, "Cocaine Trade Causes Rifts in Colombian War," *The Washington Post*, 16 September 2002, p. A01.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The links to drug trafficking and the human rights abuses by the AUC have turned away many Colombians from supporting them, however, amongst much of the rural populace, and some key members in the military, they are viewed as a necessary evil in the battle against the leftist guerrillas.

Operational Reach, Approach, and Pauses

The AUC has yet to define its operational reach and approach within Colombia due to its current development of a national strategy and organization. The AUC has the capability to conduct operations within many areas of Colombia, but its expansion has required the group to conduct a pause in order to consolidate and coordinate operations.¹⁰⁰ The reach of the organization has increased significantly in the southern and northern portions of Colombia, aided by the financial resources from drug trafficking and arms smuggling. In 2003, a large arms shipment of over 3,000 assault rifles came from Nicaragua that was destined for Panama.¹⁰¹ Links have also been established with other foreign countries providing support to the AUC. In November 2002 a Danish member of parliament was arrested in the United States on charges that he had been in negotiations with high-ranking members of the AUC for an arms deal valued at 25 million dollars.¹⁰² The paramilitaries are also capable of conducting cross border operations, especially near the northern Venezuelan border and northern border with Panama.

Tempo

The tempo of AUC operations may be having difficulty due to internal strife within the paramilitary organization and its ability to maintain control as the umbrella party to the various

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ The Associated Press, "OAS Report Blames Nicaragua for Rifle Deal," *CNN*, 21 January 2003; available from <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/americas/01/21/oas.nicaragua.ap/>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2003.

regional commanders. At a summit of the leaders to discuss strategy, funding, and organizational issues, the AUC leader Castano had difficulty in rectifying the desired separation of the paramilitaries with involvement in the drug trade. Fifteen regional commanders and the group's three national leaders signed an agreement to reunify the group after a brief period of separation, however, the Central Bolivar Bloc, 2,500 member strong, refused to do so because of their ties to the drug trade.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the recent declarations by both President Uribe and the U.S. State Department against the paramilitaries have caused the AUC to attempt a more cautious approach in the execution of their operations in order to reduce the amount of public criticisms placed against them which are thwarting attempts by Castano to gain legitimacy and cohesive for the AUC.¹⁰⁴

Summary

The AUC, as a paramilitary organization, is a threat to the state's attempt to resolve its conflict and demonstrates a social phenomenon of the Colombian people to form collectively at a local level in absence of law and order. Dissimilarly, there are other paramilitaries that are narco-terrorists, these are the groups affiliated with the drug trade who use violence and terrorism to protect its interests and wage conflict for the perpetuation of the drug trade. The threat of the AUC may be controllable through political discourse, however, because of its regional orientation, drug involvement, and the continued danger posed by the guerrillas not all regional groups will seek, nor, accept a peaceful settlement.

¹⁰² Reuters, "Danish ex-MP Arrested Over Colombia Arms Deal," CNN, 7 November 2002; available from <http://rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/aus/danish.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

¹⁰³ Scott Wilson, "Cocaine Trade Causes Rifts in Colombian War," *The Washington Post*, 16 September 2002, p. A01.

¹⁰⁴ Jeremy McDermott, "US Imposes Sanctions on Colombian Paramilitary," *BBC News*, 10 September 2002; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1790670.stm>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003, 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

COLOMBIAN STRATEGY FOR PEACE

The current Colombian strategy, embodied within Plan Colombia, appears to be failing.

The Colombian strategy for peace is failing because two critical conditions necessary for democratic rule still do not exist, stability and security. This is evident due to three factors: an increase in the size and scope of operations by the guerrillas and paramilitaries, an increase of violence within the country that has caused massive internal displacement of Colombians, and an increase in the ties between narco-guerrillas and narco-terrorists and their control of drug production and processing within the country. The strategy for stability within Colombia has been based upon two premises: peaceful negotiations with the guerrillas and limited economic reform that has targeted destabilizing the drug industry. However, peace is no closer today within Colombia than it was prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia in 1999.

Lessons from recent peace initiatives and Plan Colombia argue that the combination of narco-guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narco-terrorists operating against the Colombian government is beyond its capability to solve and that a different strategy is necessary. Colombia is experiencing a radically different security environment than that being addressed in its policy, and is suffering from the lack of a cooperative, holistic, and long-term foreign policy and military strategy to deal with that environment.¹⁰⁵ Two other key factors reducing the overall chance of success is the absence of regional integration and strategic planning by Colombia's neighbors and the US's limited focus on the "War on Drugs".

However, in the aftermath of September 11th, there has been a reassessment by both Colombia and the United States in its approach to resolving the complexities of the Colombian problem that involve addressing the narco-guerrilla-paramilitary nexus as a form of terrorism.

Unfortunately, this focus may miss the true nature of Colombia's problem and prolong the conflict unless Colombia, its regional neighbors, and the United States, utilizing all instruments of power, assist Colombia in taking more drastic measures to simultaneously attack the root causes of instability and security together.

Colombian Strategy

Colombian strategy can be defined as a series of disjointed plans to treat the symptoms of a lack of governmental control and presence throughout the country, national disorder, and economic marginalization of the people. The conflict has developed due to "the unstable environment of virtually uncontrolled violence, rural poverty, political disarray, and government weakness",¹⁰⁶ further compounded by the growth and prosperity of the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug trade. In evaluating the strategy of Colombia, a regional analyst wrote,

For forty years the various Colombian governments dealt with the problem on a completely ad hoc basis-without a strategic plan, without adequate or timely intelligence, without a consensus among the political, economic, and military elites about how to deal with armed opposition, and, importantly, within an environment of mutual enmity between the civilian government and the armed forces.¹⁰⁷

Current Colombian strategy, supported by US dollars, has been linked to two policies, peace negotiations with the leftist guerrillas and internal reform led by Plan Colombia. This strategy has been based on a few crucial assumptions: first, the leftist guerrillas are interested in a peaceful settlement given certain concessions and second, dismantling the drug trade through economic reforms aimed at the rural populace would reduce support for the insurgency and drug traffickers. This policy fails to address the fundamental causes of the problem in Colombia and the "thread", according to Manwaring, that ties the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers,

¹⁰⁵ Max G. Manwaring *Colombia's Ambiguous Wars in Global and Regional Context: Insurgency, Transnational Crime and Terror* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 1.

¹⁰⁶ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

“adequate freedom of movement and action over time.”¹⁰⁸ In the past decade, serious attempts were tried at establishing peace in a piecemeal fashion. Initiatives were attempted by both the legislative and executive branches to deal with the leftist guerillas, paramilitaries, while separate, non-linked, approaches were made against the drug cartels. The synergy of these elements and their adaptability has foiled the government’s attempts.

Pastrana’s Peace Initiatives

In 1998, a new attempt was made at suing for peace within Colombia with the election of President Andres Pastrana. Pastrana ran on a political platform to end the insurgent war and restore peace with a dramatic plan to give land to the leftist guerrillas in exchange for peace talks, declaring, “For peace I risk everything.”¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, he established a 16,000 square-mile demilitarized zone, *The Despeje*, an area the size of Switzerland, with a population of 96,000 people in which the FARC was allowed to control almost four percent of Colombia’s territory, unmolested by either the government or its armed forces.¹¹⁰ The issue of seceding land to the FARC became a controversial issue both within Colombia and internationally. Strategically, Pastrana demonstrated the deep desperation felt by the Colombian government in finding an amiable solution to the largest guerrilla group, while ignoring the objectives of the paramilitaries. Operationally, it demonstrated the ineffectiveness of its armed forces and national police to provide security within the country and conduct successful operations to defeat the insurgency. The strategic implication, perceived by the other armed-groups, was the opportunity for political legitimacy and recognition through continued violence and corruption. At the operational level, the guerrilla groups were provided an operational pause in the government’s attacks against them, and for the paramilitaries political ammunition for their cause. One report from *The New York*

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁹ Gabriel Marcella, *Plan Colombia: The Strategic and Operational Imperatives*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 5.

¹¹⁰ Gabriel Marcella, and Donald Schulz, *Colombia’s Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), 4.

Times summed up the problem with such an approach in the case of the FARC, stating that the “frustrated government” had given the guerrillas “what they craved the most: uncontested territory of their own.”¹¹¹

The frustrated negotiations between President Pastrana and FARC leader, Marulanda, finally ended three years later when Pastrana decided to suspend peace talks after the FARC guerrillas hijacked a commercial airplane in Colombia and kidnapped a Colombian senator on board.¹¹² The dissolution of the *Despeje* returned the negotiating table of the government and FARC to the battlefield; however, the political objectives remained unmodified in Plan Colombia.

Strategically and operationally, the FARC fared well during this period because they were able to use the *Despeje* in order to gain political legitimacy at the expense of the Pastrana Administration. They were also afforded the opportunity to reorganize, train, and better equip their forces while they used the *Despeje* to continue their drug trafficking operations. The paramilitaries used this period to gain political momentum in their efforts to thwart the political and military objectives of the FARC and also gain recognition from the government and the leadership of its armed forces. At the strategic and operational level, it should be clear that the FARC are not interested in negotiating peace with the Colombian government, and that the three year period afforded them has increased their military and economic capability to wage war. In terms of the paramilitaries, the policy of negotiating with the guerrillas has run counter to their objectives and reaffirmed their course of action to destroy the leftist groups wherever they can, even at the expense of acting contrary to the government.

¹¹¹ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 28.

¹¹² U.S. Department of State, “State Department Spokesman on Breakdown of Peace Talks in Colombia,” *Washington File*, 22 February 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/peace22.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia is a broad spectrum of ideas and plans to deal with the economic, social, political, and military morass within Colombia.¹¹³ Plan Colombia was formulated by the former Pastrana Administration in response to the crisis in Colombia. The Pastrana Administration proposed the plan to the Clinton Administration and lawmakers in 1999, who were attracted to it because it offered a methodology to curbing the expanding drug trade, promoted US interests within the region, and represented a self-imposed, bold endeavor by Colombia to solve, with international assistance, their growing problem of instability.¹¹⁴ The plan has ten elements:

1. Economic recovery. Sets initiatives for free trade agreements and foreign investment.
2. Fiscal and financial reform.
3. A “peace strategy” with a view to achieving a negotiated peace settlement with the guerrillas.
4. Strengthening the armed forces and the police in order to restore rule of law and security throughout the country.
5. Judicial reform.
6. A counter-narcotics strategy, in partnership with other countries.
7. Agricultural development and other economic activities to provide legal alternatives for coca farmers and coca plantations laborers.
8. Popular mobilization against corruption and violence.
9. Social programs to alleviate the poor.
10. Involvement by international community to participate in the Plan.¹¹⁵

The overall strategy of Plan Colombia is linking economic development and security to the peace process.¹¹⁶ The authors of the plan theorized that targeting the drug trade as a centerpiece of Plan Colombia, while offering economic development within the country, would reduce the influence, legitimacy, and capabilities of the guerrillas and paramilitaries and reestablish governmental control. Strategically, the plan outlines political and economic

¹¹³ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 61.

¹¹⁴ Nagle, Luz E., *Plan Colombia: Reality of the Colombian Crisis and Implications for Hemispheric Security*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA), December 2002.

¹¹⁵ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 61-62.

¹¹⁶ Marcella, *Plan Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 10.

objectives while not providing a strategic conceptual plan for the military and security forces to restore peace through national presence. Operationally, the plan has focused on building Colombia's counter narcotics capabilities, funded heavily by the United States, with targeted goals in the reduction of coca production and crop eradication programs.¹¹⁷

The plan, five years in scope, is estimated to cost \$7.5 billion dollars, Colombia providing \$4 billion dollars and the international community, \$3.5 billion dollars.¹¹⁸ The United States pledged \$1.3 billion dollars, 74 percent "earmarked" for counter-narcotics operations.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, according to critics of the Plan, it has several deficiencies. First, it has no military strategy associated with the plan and most references to military matters are only in connection with counter narcotics operations. The failure not to address needed capabilities to conduct operations against the guerrillas and paramilitaries that protect and prosper from the drug trade reveals the true fault in the plan, it is limited to counter narcotics and does not encompass counterinsurgency operations. In Congressional testimony in April 2002, the acting SOUTHCOM commander outlined the US military's support to Plan Colombia, which focused on counter drug operations and resources provided to the Colombian military against coca production, but nothing in regards to operational objectives against the FARC and paramilitaries.¹²⁰ A second flaw in Plan Colombia was that it was never presented or argued in front of the Colombian people or Congress.¹²¹ According to Luz Nagle, a former judge in Colombia, and now professor in the United States, "Most Colombians feel, justifiably, that the plan has been forced upon them by a Colombian president who did not first consider the collective will and wishes of the nation."¹²² The lack of national cohesion for Plan Colombia, the failed attempts at peace with the guerrillas,

¹¹⁷ Nagle, *Plan Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002).

¹¹⁸ Marcella, *Plan Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 10.

¹¹⁹ Rabassa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington: RAND, 2001), 62.

¹²⁰ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Army Commander Discusses Security Needs for Colombia," *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041104.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹²¹ Nagle, *Plan Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 4.

¹²² *Ibid.*

and the focus of efforts on prosecuting the drug war have further exasperated the problem within the country and demonstrated the need for a new strategy that attacks, across the spectrum, the problem within Colombia by first addressing its roots causes and then its symptoms.

Uribe and a New War

In May 2002, Colombians voiced their frustration at the failures of Plan Colombia and the lack of successes by the Colombian government to resolve the conflict within the country by electing Alvaro Uribe as president, the first-ever landslide victory in Colombia's history.¹²³ Uribe ran on a hard-line platform, vowing to provide Colombia "democratic security" against the leftist guerrillas and paramilitaries through military action, negating the policy of peaceful negotiations with FARC, ELN, and AUC of the previous four years.¹²⁴

Uribe is a lawyer, former Mayor of Medellin and Governor of Antioquia, where he employed collective security as a means to counter the leftist guerrilla groups to much success, especially in the province of Uraba against the FARC.¹²⁵ He has a Harvard and Oxford education, and has experienced the violence of the guerrillas first-hand; his father was killed by the FARC in 1983 and he has personally survived numerous assassination attempts by the guerrillas.¹²⁶ Uribe has called for an expansion in size of the military and the creation of a one million man national militia to combat the narco-guerrillas and paramilitaries. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States, he has approached Washington as an ally in the War on Terrorism, and is seeking greater US support for resolving Colombia's problems by labeling the threats within the country as terrorism. "Uribe's plans for reestablishing state control over the national territory and for crushing militarily those armed actors unwilling to negotiate on the government's terms-goals widely supported by the Colombian population-rely heavily on United States military

¹²³ McDermott, Jeremy, *Analysis: Uribe's Challenge*, BBC News, (Americas Section), May 27, 2002.

¹²⁴ Julia E. Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia?," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (September/October 2002): 123.

¹²⁵ McDermott, Jeremy, *Profile Alvaro Uribe Velez*, BBC News, (Americas Section), August 7, 2002.

assistance.”¹²⁷ Uribe has identified the obstacles in front of a secure and stable Colombia, and the needed resources he will need in order to combat the non-state actors threatening his government, however, regional and international unity of effort will be a requirement for its success. For now, Uribe is content on lobbying the US government as a partner in the War on Terrorism, yet, development of a national strategy will force his government and others to recognize the true threats to his country and a national security strategy that supports a policy intent on securing its territory, economy, and provide for a stable and secure environment for all Colombians.

Regional and International Support

Perhaps one of the greatest flaws in finding a solution to the instability within Colombia has been the lack of regional support and a unified regional strategy to assist Colombia in its war against the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. Colombia’s neighbors have “expressed grave concern over the effect of the plan (Plan Colombia) on their own national security, and declined, tacitly or otherwise, to support it.”¹²⁸ Strategic aims and operational objectives must recognize that the lack of stability within Colombia, especially along its border regions, and the government’s inability to secure its own territory, allows for the freedom of movement and action by the three non-state actors. Any feasible strategy will have to incorporate a plan to control the borders of Colombia in order to affect and operate against the enemy’s external lines of operations, and this will require the involvement of Colombia’s neighbors- militarily, politically, and economically- a degree of cooperation unparalleled within the region. By choosing to ignore the problem, Colombia’s neighbors and the international community have failed to recognize a regional fact that “the spillover effects of the illegal drug and arms trafficking industry have inspired criminal violence, corruption, and instability throughout Latin America in general and

¹²⁶ Julia E. Sweig, “What Kind of War for Colombia?,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (September/October 2002): 122-123.

¹²⁷ Arlene B. Tickner, “Colombia and the United States: From Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism,” *Current History* 181, no. 661 (February 2003): 85.

¹²⁸ Nagle, *Plan Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 36.

the Caribbean transit countries in particular.”¹²⁹ The primary organizations to lead such an effort will be the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Andean Regional Initiative (ARI), which has been proposed by the Bush Administration “as the next stage of a long-term effort”¹³⁰ to address the threat of narcotics, its causes, and a regional effort to prevent further spillover into Colombia’s neighbors.

US Role from Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism

U.S. Strategy for the past two decades towards Colombia has been focused on the “drug war” and has continued to do so under the auspices of Plan Colombia at the expense of developing a strategy recognizing the real interests of the United States within the region and providing solutions to assist Colombia resolve its internal conflict. Historically, US policy towards Latin America has been based upon its security needs and economic interests. Throughout the 20th century, the US was involved directly and indirectly in the affairs of Latin America in order to preserve a stable and secure Western Hemisphere that was economically open to US exports and politically aligned along Western democratic values. However, since the end of the Cold War and the Iran-Contra Affair, US security interests—thus its attention, have focused elsewhere in the world at the expense of Latin America.

Surprisingly for the United States, the growing drug trade in the 1990s created a new enemy that had direct security implications to the United States. US policy within the region was influenced by the fact that it could attribute 100,000 deaths to drugs in a decade, with a total societal cost of \$300 billion dollars annually to combat it and its effects within the US—the main source of the drugs was Colombia.¹³¹ US counter-narcotics policy manifested itself into military assistance to Latin America, which became concentrated in the “source” countries, particularly

¹²⁹ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 10.

¹³⁰ Nagle, *Plan Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 34.

¹³¹ Marcella and Schulz, *Colombia's Three Wars* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 1999), 7.

Colombia.¹³² The focus of attention, popular within the US Congress, who wished to avoid another “Vietnam” in Colombia, focused on narcotics as the root problem and a strategy of law enforcement as the solution. The problem in Colombia was not viewed as a synergy between the leftist guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the drug trade, whose objective was to undermine governmental authority and plunge Colombia into further chaos.

The US’s role within Plan Colombia was confined to providing support for the counter-narcotics strategy and not against the insurgency or paramilitaries, nor did it recognize any relationship between them. In 2000, the main elements of US support for Plan Colombia were:

1. Support of human rights and judicial reform-\$122 million.
2. Expansion of counter-narcotics operations in Southern Colombia-\$390.5 million for helicopters, humanitarian and development assistance.
3. Alternative economic development-\$81 million for Colombia.
4. Increased interdiction efforts-\$129.4 million.
5. Assistance for the Colombian police-\$115.6 million.

\$330 million were provided in earlier and \$256 million were committed in 2001. (Marcella, 2001, 9-10)

In 2001, Congress authorized additional monies for Colombia in order to create a US trained Colombian Army three-battalion brigade to assist the national police in conducting counter-narcotics operations.¹³³ The principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere, Lino Gutierrez, stated that the “primary objectives of Plan Colombia were to promote peace, combat the narcotics industry, revive the Colombian economy, improve respect for human rights and strengthen the democratic and social institutions of the country.”¹³⁴ Nowhere within the objectives of Plan Colombia were acknowledged the threats to its success or failure by the guerrillas or paramilitaries. A Rand report published in March 2001 affirmed that the US government should reorient its strategy in Colombia toward counterinsurgency to help the

¹³² Arlene B. Tickner, “Colombia and the United States: From Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism,” *Current History* 181, no. 661 (February 2003): 79.

¹³³ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Official Outlines Agenda for Peace and Security in Colombia,” *Washington File*, 20 June 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02062003.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2002.

Colombian government regain control of the national territory.¹³⁵ However, counterinsurgency has not been a popular subject within Congress, and in order to maintain control of US military commitments within Colombia, Congress placed a 400-man limit on US military personnel in Colombia and limited their activities to solely counter-narcotics training. Furthermore, congress placed standards of “human rights behavior”¹³⁶ on the Colombian government and military as a condition to receive aid.¹³⁷

The US’s drug focus with designed conditions for aid did not support the Colombian government’s strategy in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, but rather constrained it. The US government made the decision to avoid involvement in the counterinsurgency in Colombia by not recognizing its as a threat to the US, nor to the stability of Colombia or the region, and restrained itself through legislation to avoid any chance of involvement in combating it. In 2002, in the wake of the September 11th attacks against the United States and increased instability within Colombia, the State Department has begun to recognize the narco-guerrilla/paramilitary nexus. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere affairs, Otto Reich, named the FARC and paramilitaries as “terrorists” and acknowledged a link between them and the drug trade.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Army Commander Discusses Security Needs for Colombia,” *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041104.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹³⁵ Arlene B. Tickner, “Colombia and the United States: From Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism,” *Current History* 181, no. 661 (February 2003): 81.

¹³⁶ Under Section 567 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2002, the Secretary of State is required to certify as to the government of Colombia’s progress in meeting established human rights conditions in order for Congress to authorize funds. U.S. Department of State, “State Department’s Otto Reich Outlines Terrorist Threat in Colombia,” *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041103.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, “State Department’s Otto Reich Outlines Terrorist Threat in Colombia,” *Washington File*, 11 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041103.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

In March of 2002, the Bush Administration approached Congress asking for new legal authorities to “address the intertwined terrorist and narcotics problems”¹³⁹. Secretary of State Colin Powell testified at a congressional hearing that the administration would have to “readjust” its policy towards Colombia based upon its “new situation”, which in reality was an admission of a narco-guerrilla/narco-terrorist synergy.¹⁴⁰ By April, the administration had decided that the current policy dealing with Colombia was not working and that “a more effective policy and strategy to address terrorism as well as narcotics trafficking”¹⁴¹ was needed. President Bush requested and received expanded authority in regards to US support for Colombia, based upon the administration assessment, for the use of US-provided support against both narcotrafficking and terrorist activities, and more assistance in 2003 to train and equip units to protect critical economic infrastructure.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Official Outlines Agenda for Peace and Security in Colombia,” *Washington File*, 20 June 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02062003.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2002.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Powell says U.S. Will Have to Readjust its Policies on Colombia,” *Washington File*, 7 March 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/powell07.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, “Pentagon Official Cites Need for Expanded U.S. Support for Colombia,” *Washington File*, 10 April 2002; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/colombia/02041002.htm>; Internet; accessed 9 September 2002.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE

STRATEGY FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA

CONCLUSION

In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people.

President George W. Bush, September 2002

Redefining the Problem

The greatest difficulty in resolving the situation in Colombia is properly identifying and defining the problem, regardless of its complexity. Colombia and its government are being threatened by three interrelated conflicts that are mutually tearing apart the systems that allow it to function as a nation-state. This conflict is a manifestation of the deeper problems within Colombia; the political-social-economic marginalization of the people, the government's inability to govern and provide security for all Colombians, and its demonstrated lack of control within its own territory. High levels of poverty and inequality are among the most stubborn and intractable problems that contribute, directly or indirectly, to social and domestic violence in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁴³ These are the underlying factors within Colombia. Drugs, guerrillas, and paramilitaries are symptoms of the greater problem; yet, in a period of over 20 years they have evolved from small, insurgent-criminal elements of minor significance to competitors for power in the country.

There are two key components to the problem within Colombia. One is the ineffectiveness of the state to function and properly govern by providing for the security and stability of the people. This includes the Colombians dissatisfaction with their social, economic,

and political status and role within their democratic system. The second problem is the threat posed by the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers towards the government's ability to protect the people and provide for stability within the whole of the nation. Current strategy, defined by Plan Colombia, attempts to resolve the first set of problems at the expense of addressing the latter. However, Colombia's government cannot be successful without eliminating the threat to its government first, setting the conditions to concentrate on the more fundamental issues.

The conflict cannot be framed solely as Colombian because it encompasses many other parts of the region. Drug trafficking, insurgency, and paramilitary activities are evident throughout the region and also threaten Colombia's neighbors. Outside of the region, the conflict has international implications as well; especially for the United States, where the greatest market for illegal drug consumption exists and refugees from the region have sought escape. In the context of the War on Terrorism, these groups have the potential capability to greatly affect the US's internal security, drug trafficking notwithstanding, and interests within the region. Therefore, the problem is Colombian, regional, and hemispheric and should be viewed in that framework.

Finding the Right Strategy

The current strategy in Colombia is not working for three reasons: the Colombian government has no military strategy to compliment Plan Colombia, there is no universally accepted strategy within the region to assist Colombia, and internationally, the conflict is viewed through the lens of a drug problem, not one of narco-insurgency and narco-terrorism. Accordingly, there are several conflicting views to developing a functional strategy capable of solving the conflict in Colombia. One point of view, supporting the idea that the problem is a Colombian one, advocates greater political dialogue and peaceful negotiations with the various

¹⁴³ Mayra Buvinic, Andrew Morrison, and Michael Shifter, *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Framework for Action* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Bank, March 1999), 37-38.

groups, along with more resources, i.e., international economic and military aid, for the government in order to control the population and limit drug production. COL Nunez, a military analyst of the region, argues for a strategy “that is unconventional, comprehensive, supportive of democracy, and makes use of a huge and untapped resource, the people.”¹⁴⁴ His analysis promotes a strategy in which the Colombian government maintains a limited burden of responsibility in providing security to the people in order to establish peace and advocates a greater role of the populace in providing the security necessary for stability.

This strategy, incremental in nature, is designed to establish security within Colombia with the use of local militias and constabulary forces “one town at a time”¹⁴⁵ and argues against the use of outside military forces to intervene in support of the Colombian government. Such a strategy has two critical flaws in amalgamating the country and ending the prolonged conflict. First, it fails to reinforce the government’s national responsibility, through its armed forces and national police, to provide for security and stability within its territorial boundaries-not subordinating its authority to local militias will further the cause of the paramilitaries. Second, it fails to recognize that Colombia, regardless of popular support, is perhaps incapable of internally solving its problem because of the strengths of the insurgent, paramilitaries, and drug cartels and their ability to influence the populace through fear and violence.

Another regional analyst, Max Manwaring, supports a more stringent Colombian strategy, based upon the use of Colombian military force to compel the capitulation of the insurgents and paramilitaries. He argues that the Colombian government can be successful if they meet the following two objectives:

1. Professionalize and modernize the country’s police forces and judicial system to the point where they can enforce and administer the law fairly and effectively throughout the entire country.

¹⁴⁴ Nunez, *Fighting the Hobbesian Trinity in Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 19.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

2. The government must professionalize and modernize the military to a level where it has the capability to neutralize and/or destroy the illegal perpetrators of violence throughout the national territory.¹⁴⁶

Limiting military response to just the Colombian armed forces fails to recognize that these objectives, necessary to set conditions for conflict resolution, may not be achievable due to the limited resources of the government and the operational capabilities of the leftist guerrillas and paramilitaries. The military's current capability, some 146,000 troops, is possibly not large enough to defeat the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers based upon the size and terrain of the country.¹⁴⁷ Operations by the military in guerrilla strongholds over the past several years have demonstrated that the state cannot defeat the guerrillas, and the guerrillas cannot defeat the state, thus prolonging the current stalemate.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, these objectives may take a substantial period of time to achieve, further protracting the conflict to the benefit of the government's enemies. Although this logic underlines the importance of a military component within the strategic framework, it does not take into account the fact that once the guerrillas and paramilitaries have become firmly established, as they have in southern and eastern Colombia, reform and development efforts are insufficient in order to deal with them.

Based upon the strategic aims of the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers, and their actions, it is possible to deduce that a peaceful resolution is not possible. Winning for these organizations is not losing. Prolonging the conflict is advantageous for the narco-guerrillas and narco-terrorists, not the government. The FARC, elements of the AUC, and other paramilitary groups are not interested in peace because some believe they can win, primarily the FARC. A peace settlement would threaten their ability to operate and benefit from the current chaos and stalemate within Colombia. Drug traffickers as well are content with the current situation because they can manipulate the divisions within the country in order to continue operations.

¹⁴⁶ Manwaring, *U.S. Security Policy in the Western Hemisphere* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 23.

¹⁴⁷ Marcella and Schulz, *Colombia's Three War* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 1999), 30.

¹⁴⁸ Richard Downes, *Landpower and Ambiguous Warfare: The Challenge of Colombia in the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 1999), 19.

The leftist guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug cartels can only be defeated by “superior organization and a political-military strategy designed to neutralize or eliminate them.”¹⁴⁹ Prolonging the conflict is disadvantageous to the government and people in Colombia and they must develop strategic and operational level objectives to expeditiously defeat the threats and begin internal social, political, and economic reform. For any strategy to be successful it must include regional and western support, all focused on unity of effort, to defeat the leftist guerrillas, paramilitaries, and destroy the drug trade and prevent them from withdrawing into other regional countries. The failure to do so is already apparent in the lack of success of Plan Colombia and the US’s War on Drugs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The escalating conflict in Colombia requires a new strategy with a focus on developing strategic aims to simultaneously attack the root problems of the country and its threats through the use of all instruments of national power. The strategic aims of stability and security should be encompassed in strategic objectives to establish territorial control and presence throughout all of Colombia, thereby unifying the country geographically and socially. Economic objectives need to target the marginalized rural and urban populaces, and create conditions in which prosperity does not rest in the drug industry, but other marketplaces. Politically, the government must acknowledge its role as the guarantor of stability and security to the Colombian populace and admit to its inability to defeat the threats facing the government without outside assistance.

President Uribe has begun to seek further military assistance from the United States by linking his cause to the US’s War on Terrorism. The conflict in Colombia should not be viewed as singularly a war against terrorism, but one against armed-insurgent, criminal groups who utilize terrorism to influence both the populace and government to achieve their objectives.

¹⁴⁹ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 18.

Dialogue is necessary from international organizations representing the interests and collective security of the region, such as the OAS, the Confederation of Andean Countries, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Authorization and support should be given to form a regional strategy, to include the United States, in developing a military strategy to defeat the threats within Colombia and provide for post-conflict operations aimed at achieving territorial control and stability throughout the country.

Colombia

*A military effort alone will not bring Colombia back from the brink of total failure as a democracy, but failure is certain without it.*¹⁵⁰

Developing a military strategy to accomplish these strategic objectives should focus on the issue of security, which should include regional and international military cooperation and provide a framework for coalition and joint operations. At the strategic level, the coalition armed forces should be given operational level objectives both for their respective national security and for the unified effort in Colombia. At the operational level, the Colombian armed forces must develop objectives that are derived from a military strategy aimed at territorial denial to the narco-guerrillas and narco-terrorists, their defeat, and subsequent presence throughout Colombia and along their borders. Military objectives should be framed along the following lines of operations:

1. Reestablish governmental control within entirety of Colombian territory.
2. Provide security to population throughout Colombia by defeating guerrillas and paramilitaries and regain control of territory.
3. Destroy the drug industry and eliminate their networks.

These objectives will require a greater amount of forces and resources than the Colombian government currently has, however, they will be necessary for framing any campaign aimed at a firm and lasting peace.

¹⁵⁰ Marcella, *Plan Colombia* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), 18.

Regional

The strategic aims of the region should be to support Colombia in order to defeat the country's enemies, prevent spillover into their countries, reassert control of their respective borders, and set conditions for regional stability. Regional leadership should be exercised and reinforced by the OAS, to include participation of the United States, in order to promote unity of effort and political legitimacy for intervention in Colombia. A South American nation should lead the regional coalition in order to build credibility within the region and set conditions for follow on reconstruction efforts. Brazil, with its geographic location, size of military force, and growing importance would be the best option. Strategically, the region should establish the following objectives to support a Colombian strategy:

1. Regional recognition of the internal conflict in Colombia as regional in scope. Provide needed support, (political, military, informational, economic), to Colombia.
2. Develop a regional military strategy in conjunction with Colombia and the United States to defeat insurgents, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers and secure border regions.
3. Establish coalition peacekeeping force to prevent spillover and support follow on post-conflict issues.

Several operational considerations may be crucial to coalesce regional support and action. Border control, disruption of drug trafficking, and arms smuggling may provide the necessary incentives for countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, and Brazil to act. However, involvement must begin at the planning stage and continue through to execution, with linkages to post-conflict operations.

The United States

For Colombia to be successful in defeating the threats to its stability, the United States will have to change its strategic policies within the region. The United States has tended to ignore the insurgent and paramilitary problems in Colombia-except for making rhetorical statements regarding the peace process, terrorist activities, and human rights violations. The United States has focused its money, training, and attention almost entirely on the counterdrug campaign.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Manwaring, *Nonstate Actors in Colombia*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2002), 18.

Colombia's problem is much greater than drugs and US policy must reverse the handling of its own affairs in regards to Colombia. Problem recognition of the conflict and its impacts to the internal security and interests of the US need to come first. Any action within the region by the United States should not be labeled as part of The War on Terrorism because of the term's problematic relevance to the situation in Colombia. It may provide the incentives for Colombia to approach the US and reduce limitations by the US Congress on US assistance; however, terrorism as the reason to justify any US intervention would fall short of attracting support and legitimacy—two critical components within the region and the US.

Strategically, the US should assume the lead in building a coalition for action. The strategic aims are simple and clear, defeat the threats to regional and hemispheric stability and eliminate potential threats to the national security of the United States. The strategic objectives and military strategy require an objective to defeat the threats within Colombia and to its neighbors, using all instruments of power. Based upon the assessment at the strategic and operational level of the adversaries in Colombia, a military solution may be necessary in order to set the conditions for Colombia to reestablish security and stability. This would entail pursuing a military campaign in coalition with regional partners to defeat the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. Counter-drug policy would be subordinate to counterinsurgency and peace enforcement operations.

Any developed US military strategy will need to take in consideration the following operational imperatives:

- Coalition and joint operations.
- Interagency support for military operations targeted at the drug trade and external lines of communication.
- Prevent enemy's ability to conduct a prolonged campaign.
- Deny border regions and transnational networks (sea, air, land).
- Isolate enemy forces in Colombia.
- Train Colombian military in small unit operations; provide greater resources to allow Colombian armed forces to conduct sustained, full spectrum operations.

- Use overwhelming power.
- Conduct simultaneous air/land/maritime operations.

Force tailoring should be designed to conduct counterinsurgency and humanitarian operations, and thus should be rapidly deployable, sustainable, and prepared for small unit actions. These units will require a capability to launch independent and coordinated air attacks, and to operate in austere conditions at extended distances from their main operating bases.¹⁵² The US, based upon the training, resources, and experience of the regional armed forces, would have to lead the planning at the operational level, because it will be critical for success in this environment.

In conclusion, the crisis in Colombia is complex and there are no simple solutions. Colombia, the region, and the international community-especially the United States, must recognize the scope and depth of the conflict and join together in order to solve it. Colombia must develop a national security strategy, with a supporting military strategy, to provide security for the people and stabilize the country. Governmental authority must be restored to every sector of the nation and fundamental problems resolved. Regionally, Colombia's neighbors must understand their stake in the outcome of the conflict and work in cooperation with the OAS and other regional organizations to develop a complimentary strategy to support Colombia. Colombia cannot solve this war alone based on its extent and intensity. Finally, the US must take the lead in unifying a regional effort to support Colombia, and be ready, if necessary to assist with whatever means necessary, both at the strategic and operational level, to end this conflict before Colombia collapses or it spreads further into the hemisphere.

¹⁵² Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict, *Operational Considerations for Military Involvement in Low Intensity Conflict* (Langley Air Force Base, Virginia: CLIC Papers, June 1987), 13.

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